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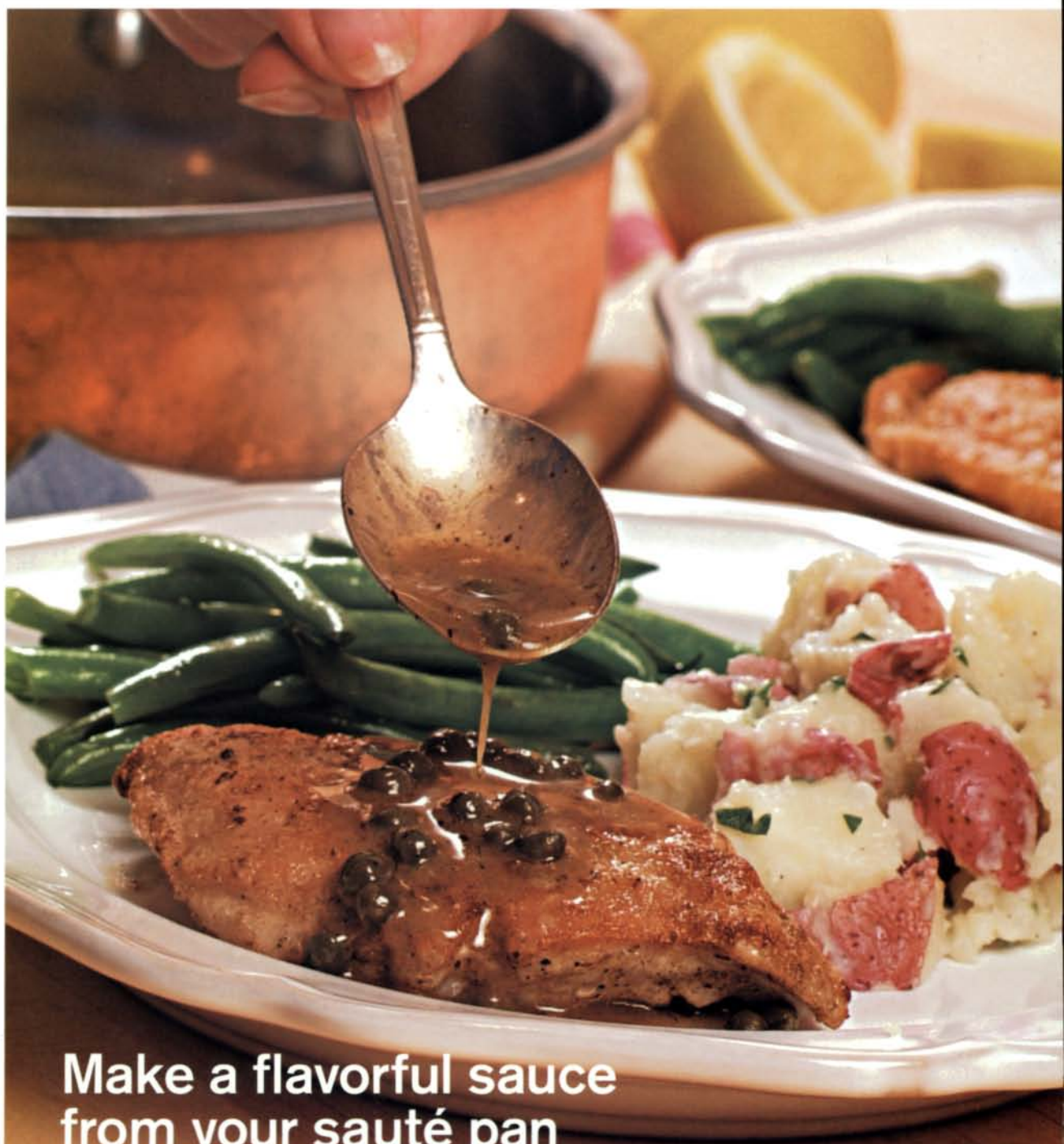
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44 Why is spinach such a popular green? Versatility is part of the answer. Try it on pizza, simply sautéed, or tossed with shrimp and pasta.



fine COOKING®

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Enjoy it creamed, sautéed, tossed into pasta, or as a fresh topping for pizza

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A ball-topped tower grater and a razor-sharp rasp could provide all the flakes and shreds you'll ever need

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by Leslie Revsin

Olive oil in the batter is the secret to a moist, tender cake with lots of character

64 A Spanish Tortilla Is the Best of All Omelets

by Sarah Jay

Transform potatoes, onions, and eggs into a delicious dinner, breakfast, lunch, or snack

68 New York Style Bagels

by Peter Reinhart

For the chewy crumb and shiny crust coveted by bagel fans, use the right flour and boil the dough before baking

73 Making the Creamiest Rice Pudding

by Abigail Johnson Dodge

Milk—not cream—makes a silky pudding, and ingredients like coffee, caramel, ginger—even coconut—make variation exciting

On the cover: *Sautéed Chicken Breasts with Lemon-Caper Pan Sauce, p. 38.*

Cover photo, Scott Phillips.

These pages: top left series, Amy Albert; above, Sarah Jay; right, Amy Albert; bottom left, Scott Phillips.

54 Peanut butter cookies are doubly good when you add a chocolate-flecked filling.



visit our web site: www.finecooking.com



Peter Reinhart ("Bagels," p. 68), the founder of Brother Juniper's Bakery in Santa Rosa, California, gives talks and classes nationally about the artisan bread movement and teaches full-time at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. He's the author of four books, including *Crust & Crumb: Master Formulas for Serious Bread Bakers* (Ten Speed Press), which won the James Beard Award for best baking book of 1998, and *Bread Upon the Waters: A Pilgrimage Toward Self Discovery & Spiritual Truth* (Perseus Books). Peter is working on a new book of advanced bread making techniques, due out this fall.

Randall Price

("Hungarian Classics," p. 32) was working as a chef in Ohio when a chocolate cake changed his life: he entered a *Chocolatier* recipe contest, won a pastry course at La Varenne in Paris, and from there launched a career in Europe as a chef, caterer, and teacher, including several years as chef to the U.S. ambassador to Hungary. Randall currently consults and teaches at La Varenne's Château du Fey and cooks for private clients in Paris and the Auvergne.



careers to his true love, food. Alan spent six years as the forager for Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California, hunting down the best organic produce for the restaurant's menus. He's a contributor to the *Chez Panisse Café Cookbook* and the forthcoming *Chez Panisse Fruit*. Alan is currently the head of Chez Panisse's pastry department.



Steve Hunter

("Garlic Bread," p. 48) landed the job as *Fine Cooking's* art director seven years ago not only for his design skills but also because of his passion for cooking. Since his days as an art student in New York (when he first started perfecting his garlic bread recipe), Steve has cooked his way through many cuisines—Japanese and Cajun being two of his favorites. He has extended his love of exotic ingredients to his kitchen garden, where he grows everything from artichokes to Asian herbs.



Shirley Sarvis

("Ground Meat," p. 50) is a leading wine and food consultant who teaches and lectures on taste exploration and wine-food combina-

tions. Shirley consulted on Time-Life's *Good Cooks* series, has written for many food and wine magazines, and has written a dozen

books, including *A Taste of Portugal* and *Table for Two*. She lives in San Francisco.

Linda Weber

("Peanut Butter Cookies," p. 54) is the pastry chef at Della Fattoria, the Weber family artisan bakery in Petaluma, California. She trained at Contra Costa College's culinary program and has worked at the prestigious Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa in Boyes Hot Springs, California.



Robert Wemischner

("Graters," p. 56), teaches professional baking at Los Angeles Trade Technical College. The co-author of *Gourmet to Go: A Guide to Opening & Operating a Specialty Food Store*, he lectures widely on entrepreneurship in the food world. His latest book is *Cooking with Tea*, which he wrote with Diana Rosen.

Early in her career, **Leslie Revsin** ("Olive Oil Cakes," p. 59) broke new ground as the first woman chef at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. She opened her own bistro in New York City in 1977, when women restaurateurs were few and far between. Her first book, *Great Fish, Quick*, was a finalist for a Julia Child Award. Leslie now spends her time writing and being a personal "kitchen coach" for home cooks. Her second book, *Easy Elegance in an Hour*, is due out this fall.

Sarah Jay's enchantment with Spanish cooking ("Tortilla," p. 64) goes back to 1989, when she lived with a large, traditional family in Granada who brought her along on their nightly tapas excursions and weekly paella outings. Now married to a Madrileño, Sarah extols the virtues of Spanish food to anyone who will listen. She's an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*.

Abigail Johnson Dodge ("Rice Pudding," p. 73) is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, as well as its test kitchen director, and the author of *Great Fruit Desserts*. Her second book, *Cooking for Kids*—which includes a great rice pudding recipe, among others—came out this fall, and now she's at work on her third, *The Weekend Baker*.

Pam Anderson

("Simple Sautés," p. 38) grew up in a family of great southern cooks who didn't realize, she says, that they were teaching her "how to cook



without a book." Years later, after starting her own catering business and later working as the executive editor of *Cook's Illustrated*, Pam wrote a book that would teach other people *How to Cook Without a Book*. She also wrote *The Perfect Recipe*, and she's now working on another book. Pam teaches cooking across the country and on television (including "The Today Show"), and is the food columnist for *USA Weekend*.

Alan Tangren ("Spinach," p. 44) worked as a meteorologist before he switched

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Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com.

I like Macs

I just wanted to let you know that I believe the apples you choose for whatever baking you're doing is a matter of preference. In "Baking Homey Apple Desserts" (*Fine Cooking* #41), the MacIntosh (or Mac, as we call it in my part of Canada) wasn't a choice for inclusion in pies in your list of what apples to use where. It's my favorite for pies and crisps. I've used other varieties, but I always come back to the Mac.

It's important to give guidance to those who have never been down the path, but I think it's also important to preface recommendations with "it's all a matter of preference." Many people would hesitate to try an apple if it weren't on the recommended list. [Your advice] carries a lot of weight, you know. Cooking and baking is a creative process; wouldn't want to stifle it. Love your magazine!

—Jennifer Webster,
Ottawa, Ontario

Why should I trust the new pressure cookers?

I was very interested in the article on pressure cookers (*FC* #42). For many years, I used a pressure cooker routinely, until one day when I experienced one of the "legendary" mishaps. I was pressuring apples to make apple butter and a

piece of apple got stuck in the vent. The lid did indeed explode...all over the kitchen, and me. I received second- and third-degree burns on my face, neck, and wrists. It was no "apocryphal" experience, I can assure you!

Since these new cookers have appeared on the market, I've been tempted to try them again, but I'm still very leery of pressurized steam. Your article has me thinking more positively about the prospects of buying a new cooker.

But since your author didn't seem too inclined to believe in the dangers of using a pressure cooker, she didn't mention any safety features in her article. Just being able to let off the pressure ("pushing a button or flipping a lever"), doesn't guarantee a clear vent and complete steam release. Do these new pots have anything that will prevent pieces of food getting stuck in the vent? Do any of them advertise "safety features"?

Thank you for a mighty "fine cooking" magazine!

—Ann Walper, via e-mail

Editors' note: The two biggest safety features of the new-generation pressure cookers are back-up safety valves and locking mechanisms in the lids. A Kuhn Rikon representative explained to us that their pressure cookers have a series of three safety valves. If the cooker goes overpressure, a safety valve automatically releases pressure. If *that* valve is clogged, a secondary valve will let pressure

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Fine Cooking

The Taunton Press, 63 S. Main St., P.O. Box 5506,
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To contribute an article, give a tip, or ask a question, contact *Fine Cooking* at the address above or:

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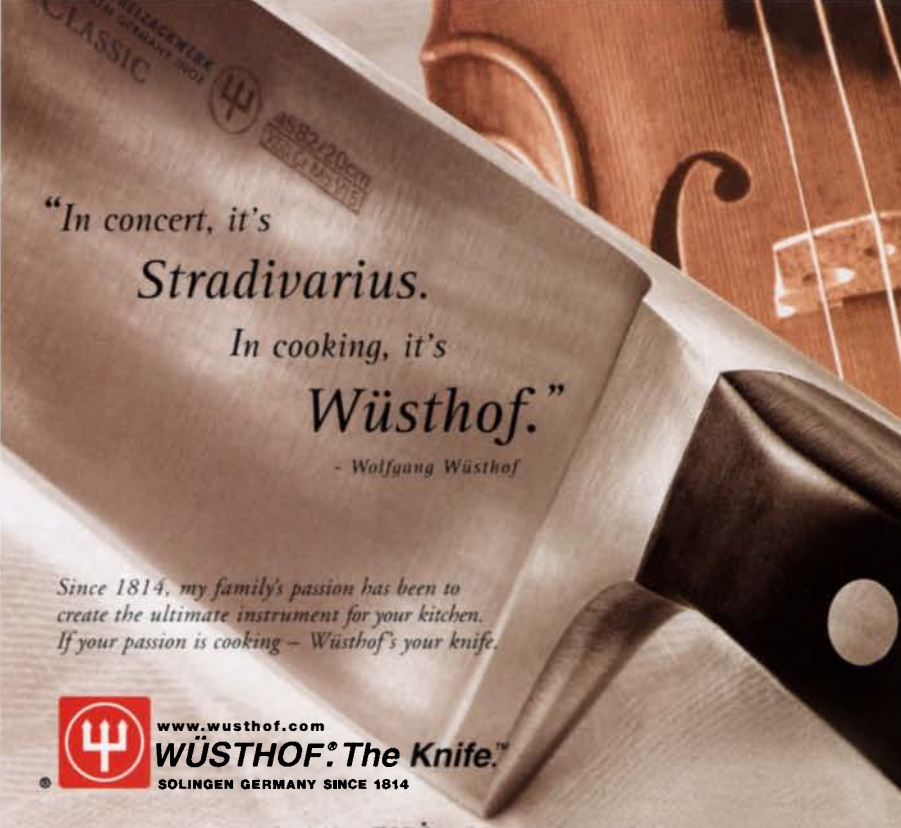
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LETTERS

out. And a third set of valves will kick in if the second one is clogged. Not all new pressure cookers have three release valves, but most have at least a second to back up the first.

The sauce debate goes on...

Louise A. Peterson, in her letter in *FC* #42, suggests that the use of sugar in an Italian tomato sauce is not authentic. Why then do both Elizabeth David (*Italian Food*) and Marcella Hazan (*The Classic Ital-*

ian Cookbook) include sugar in the tomato sauce recipes in their respected cookbooks?

—Charles B. Chapman
London, Ontario

...and on

I enjoy your magazine, read it cover to cover, and learn many great tips. Regarding the recent sugar-in-the-sauce letter: My Sicilian papa makes the best sauce I've ever tasted. He probably learned this from my grandmother who was born in Sicily. He puts a tablespoon or

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat up; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the time given in the recipe; use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ◆ Butter is unsalted.
- ◆ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ◆ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ◆ Sugar is granulated.
- ◆ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ◆ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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...around the country

January 20–21: *Fine Cooking* is sponsoring the Boston Wine Expo at the World Trade Center in Boston. Come to our booth to meet the editors, and watch cooking demonstrations by contributing editor Molly Stevens and frequent author Joanne Chang. For info, call 877/946-3976 or visit www.wine-expos.com.

February 19–21: Molly Stevens comes back (by popular demand!) to Sur La Table stores in Dallas on Feb. 19–20 (214/219-4404) and Houston on Feb. 21 (713/533-0400).

March 3–4: *Fine Cooking* is also sponsoring the Washington D.C. International Wine Festival at the Ronald Reagan Building & International Trade Center. Our booth will be manned by editors—waiting to meet you—and chefs Ris Lacoste and Brian Patterson will do demos. For info, call 800/343-1174 or visit www.wine-expos.com.

March 8–9: Editors Martha Holmberg and Amy Albert will teach classes in Texas based on favorite *Fine Cooking* recipes at the Central Market Cooking School in San Antonio (March 8) and in Austin (March 9). Call 512/470-9036 for info.

Plus: Jennifer Bushman demonstrates recipes from the pages of *Fine Cooking* on her “Nothing to It” television segments, airing on selected NBC and Fox stations in Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

two of sugar in the sauce, telling me it cuts down on the acid from the tomatoes.

—Bonita Oteri, via e-mail

Create a steamy oven for better breads

To bake exceptional bread in an electric oven, plug the oven chimney (usually part of the right rear burner) with aluminum foil to retain moisture. This, along with using a baking stone, lets home bakers approach bread of brick-oven

quality. Be sure to remove the plug for roasting, etc.

—John F. Hacking, Lewis, WI

Ground vanilla, clarified

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Getting acquainted with fresh hot chiles

Hot peppers, also called chiles, are simply beautiful: at the market on a dreary winter day, those glossy-smooth skins and warm, brilliant colors are a pleasure to look at. And the enormous diversity of flavors—from mild and grassy, to fruity and pungent, to pure, incendiary heat—makes chiles endlessly interesting in the kitchen.

Chiles are key ingredients in the cooking of Central and South America, the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, India, and all over Asia. Every region has developed its own chiles over time, and because new varieties are easy to breed, there are hundreds of different cultivars worldwide.

Hotter climates produce hotter chiles

Chiles thrive in areas with long, hot summers. In the United States, they're grown mainly in California and throughout the Southwest and Florida; they're also imported from Mexico. The heat level of chiles is highly influenced by the climate in which they grow. Spicy-hot pods grown in cool conditions will lack the pungency of the same variety grown in a consistently warmer climate.

The biggest, best-quality harvests come at the same time as sweet bell peppers—in late summer and early fall. But because crops are grown in warm southern and Mexican climates, you should be



Thai and other Asian chiles are slender and thin-walled with a very hot, nutty flavor. They're sometimes available green but are more often lipstick-red. Asian chiles are perfect for all kinds of stir-frying. Drop a couple into a bottle of sherry vinegar to make a hot and sour cooking condiment. The tiny pods are easy to air-dry for year-round use.

able to find good fresh chiles throughout the winter.

At the market, look for shiny, firm pods with strong, uniform color. They should feel dense and heavy for their size; good examples of even the very smallest ones will feel heavier. Avoid chiles that are flaccid, wrinkled, bruised, blemished, or discolored.

All chiles mature from green to their final color, which may be red, orange, or

yellow; even purple chiles will ripen to red. They're usable at all stages, but various varieties are traditionally picked and used at a particular color stage. Jalapeños are most often used at the green stage, while Asian chiles are often sold and used fully red, although you can also find green ones. As chiles ripen, their flavor generally intensifies, but beware: they're hot throughout the ripening process.



Habaneros are very, very hot, with a marvelous, fruity quality to their heat. While the name refers to a specific pod type from the Yucatan Peninsula, there are a similar-looking group of chiles from the Caribbean called Scotch Bonnets. Habanero chiles are a brilliant orange at maturity; you'll also find a red cultivar. Use them sparingly to make wonderful fruit-based salsas. Habaneros are a classic ingredient in Caribbean and South American barbecue marinades and pastes, and they're the principal ingredient in fiery table sauces from those areas.



Serranos are quite hot. *Serrano* means "from the mountains"; these neat, small chiles are probably of highland origin. Fruits have medium-thick walls. Serranos are great for piquant salsas and for flavoring casseroles, stews, or egg dishes, or in pickled vegetables *en escabeche*.

Chiles are well-travelled

It fascinates me that chiles are one native American food that has emigrated into almost all of the world's cuisines since Europeans came upon them five centuries ago. Chiles soon became core ingredients as they travelled along established spice trade routes from Europe to Africa and throughout Asia. Unlike other New World natives, like the tomato, chiles were

Anaheims are mild and meaty with thick, succulent flesh; they're also called New Mexico chiles. You'll find this type sold green in cans labeled "California" or "green," too. Use Anaheims stuffed for *chiles rellenos* or to add flavor without much heat to vegetable mixes, stews, and cheesy omelets.



Jalapeños are hot. Named for their home in Jalapa, Mexico, these pods have thick-walled, crunchy flesh. They're usually sold medium to dark green or maturing to red. Jalapeños are particularly delicious in salsas, sliced into rings for nachos, and pickled; they're a good all-purpose chile for myriad pungent pleasures. Jalapeños that have been smoked are known as chipotles.



Pasilla chiles are mild. You may come across several pod shapes; this one is *Pasilla salvatierra*. Fresh pasillas are a glossy, dark forest green, turning red-brown at maturity. Their flavor is mild and raisin-like (*pasilla* means "little raisin" in Spanish), with smoky overtones. Chopped pasillas can be added to vegetables, soups, or stews. When dried, this complex-flavored chile is used in *mole* sauce. A similar mild chile is *poblano*, called *ancho* when dried.



quickly accepted and integrated into local diets because they flavor food so well and they're easy to select for local growing conditions.

Add flavor, from mild to flaming

A much wider range of chile varieties has become readily available here in recent years. Most of us are still learning about and experimenting with their different flavors

and heat levels in sauces, stews, and sautés.

I use milder pasilla or Anaheim chiles—roasted, peeled, seeded, and chopped—to add zip to a mix of green beans, carrots, and corn, to a sauté of eggplant, tomatoes, onions, and squash, or to cheese sauces. Grilled pasillas top my favorite chileburgers. I use hot chiles like jalapeños for pickling with carrots, in salsas, and to add zing to bean casseroles.

I toss pungent chiles like serranos or Thai bird chiles into curries, stir-fries, and salsas.

Chiles' heat comes from capsaicin, an alkaloid found in varying amounts only in chiles. Capsaicin is contained in the sacs along the fruits' inner walls, so when you cut into a chile, the capsaicin mingles with the seeds and the skin. Capsaicin levels vary depending on the chile variety and are further modified by climate and growing conditions. Pungency is generally rated in Scoville units—a measurement scale developed by Wilbur L. Scoville in 1912, based on the expression of pungency at different dilution levels. For example, a 5,000 Scoville heat unit chile like a jalapeño will have 1 part chile extract to 5,000 parts water before it can no longer be de-

tected, but a hotter chile like a serrano would need to be diluted 10,000 to 1 for the same effect, and the superhot Tabasco chile would score 30,000 to 50,000 to 1, and thus has a Scoville rating of 30,000 to 50,000.

If you need to douse the burning heat of chiles in your mouth, drink milk or eat a milk-based food like cheese or ice cream, because the casein in dairy unbinds the capsaicin from nerve receptors in the mouth. Other foods that contained casein include beans, nuts, and milk chocolate. (Chocolate lovers, take note of this new reason to indulge.)

Renee Shepherd is a gardening cook and specialty seed retailer. Her company, Renee's Garden, offers gourmet seed packets at independent nurseries. ♦

Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

Cooking wild rice properly

I find it difficult to cook wild rice consistently because its cooking time varies so widely. Are the grains supposed to burst or still be crunchy?

—Sylvia Stokes,
Homer, NY

Beth Nelson replies: Wild rice, or *manoomin* (its Native American name) has been harvested in the lakes and streams of the Great Lakes for thousands of years. Wild rice is a misnomer, however. It's actually an aquatic grass, and al-

though still harvested "wild" from lakes and rivers, it's now being cultivated as well.

Some wild rice processors scarify more than others, and some don't scarify the grains at all. If you find the variations in cooking time frustrating, you might want to stick to one brand for a more consistent cooking time.

The degree to which you cook wild rice is a matter of taste. Some people like the grains when they've burst and are tender and fluffy. Others prefer a more nutty, crunchy texture, achieved by shorter cooking. To cook wild rice, we recommend simmering 1 part rice to 3 to 4 parts water until the kernels are done to your liking, anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes. Drain any excess liquid. The larger and darker the wild rice kernels are, the longer the simmering time.

Beth Nelson is the president of the Minnesota Cultivated Wild Rice Council.

Fixing cakes that sink in the middle

Why would a cake sink in the middle after it's baked? I made three cakes, using the same ingredients, pan, and oven each time. The first cake came out just fine but the other two sank in the middle.

—Sunny Richmond,
Northbrook, IL

Shirley Corriher responds: There are two likely reasons that a cake would fall: it might not be thoroughly baked, or it might be overleavened.

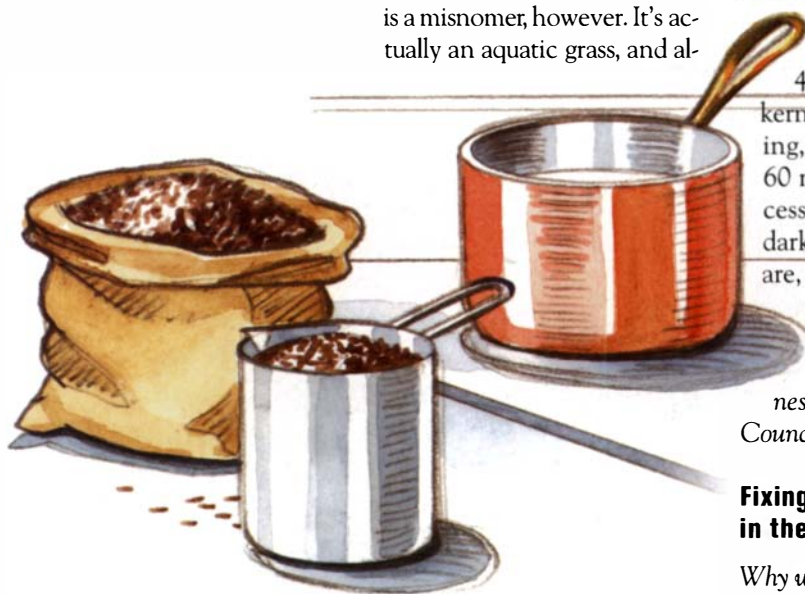
Incomplete baking. If the batter in the center of the cake pan doesn't get hot enough to rise and set completely, the cake might sink.

This might happen if the oven temperature isn't as hot as you think it is; you might have opened the oven door several times during baking or had the door open for too long when you put in the cake pan, or perhaps your oven thermostat is miscalibrated.

Too much leavening. It might seem counterintuitive that too much leavening would cause a cake to sink, but that's exactly what happens. If the batter contains excess baking powder or baking soda, the bubbles over-inflate, float to the surface, and pop, leaving you with a deflated cake.

As your experience suggests, it's possible for a cake with too much leavening to turn out fine, especially if the recipe includes baking soda, whose activity dissipates rapidly once it's added to a batter. If the batter happens to sit for a few minutes before it's baked, or if the mixing took a few minutes longer than usual, the intensity of the baking soda will dissipate somewhat and the cake might not sink. The temperature of the ingredients also makes a difference. Heat deactivates leavening more quickly, so warm ingredients could help counteract an overleavened recipe.

Many cake recipes are overleavened. A good guideline is to use 1 to 1¼ teaspoons baking powder per cup of flour, or ¼ teaspoon baking soda per cup of flour. If the recipe includes a lot of heavy ingredients, such as chopped fruits, it might need more leavening. Also, keep in mind that changing the pan size will affect the leavening needed. In a larger pan, the



though still harvested "wild" from lakes and rivers, it's now being cultivated as well.

Cooking times can vary so much from brand to brand because of differences in processing. All wild rice processors in Minnesota (there are also some in California) use the parching method. The wild rice kernels are first cured, roasted, and hulled. Then microscopically thin strips of the bran layer are removed, a process called scarification. The amount of scarification affects the rate at which the grains will absorb water, and this determines

batter will not be as deep, so you'll need less baking powder or soda.

Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a food scientist and the author of the award-winning Cook-Wise (William Morrow).

Bitter almonds: legal or not?

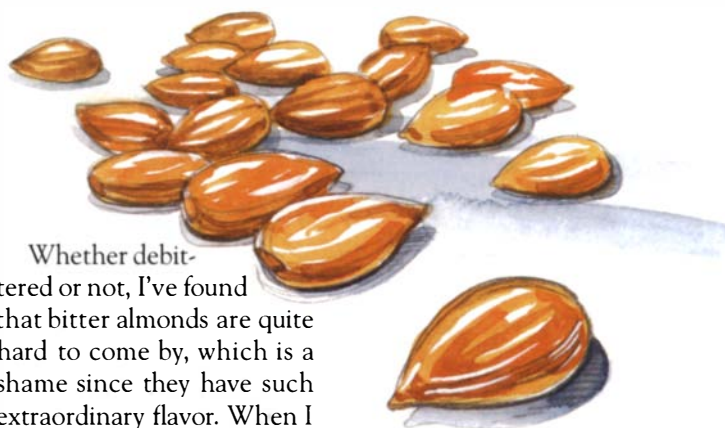
I've been looking for bitter almonds for many years. I've heard that they're illegal in the United States. Is that true?

—Paul Schrade,
via e-mail

Eve Felder replies: Bitter almonds and sweet almonds are both stone fruit identified as *Prunus amygdalus*, but their flavors are very different. The

main difference is that bitter almonds contain a chemical compound, called amygdalin, which breaks down into benzaldehyde and trace amounts of cyanide, a poison. Benzaldehyde, also known as bitter oil of almond, is the flavor component of bitter almonds; it's a flavor that you're no doubt familiar with as it's used (often in synthetic forms) in almond extract.

According to the Food & Drug Administration, bitter almonds are legal and fall under the "generally regarded as safe" category, as long as they've been "de-bittered." De-bittering removes the cyanide and forces the flavorful benzaldehyde deeper into the nutmeat.



Whether debittered or not, I've found that bitter almonds are quite hard to come by, which is a shame since they have such extraordinary flavor. When I cooked at Chez Panisse, we would rejoice when we got our hands on bitter almonds, using them to infuse flavor into custards, *crème anglaise*, or stone fruit jams. But usually we made do with a substitute: We would crack open the pits of apricots, peaches, or nectarines and remove the slim seed, or *noyau*, inside. Because bitter almonds and seeds from other stone fruit contain cyanide, it isn't advisable to eat them; instead, I use

them in small quantities as a flavoring agent. Two *noyaux* are sufficient for flavoring a half-pint of homemade jam, and a tablespoon will flavor a pint of *crème anglaise*. Discard the *noyaux* once they've flavored the sauce or jam.

Eve Felder, formerly a chef at Chez Panisse Café in Berkeley, California, is an associate dean at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. ♦

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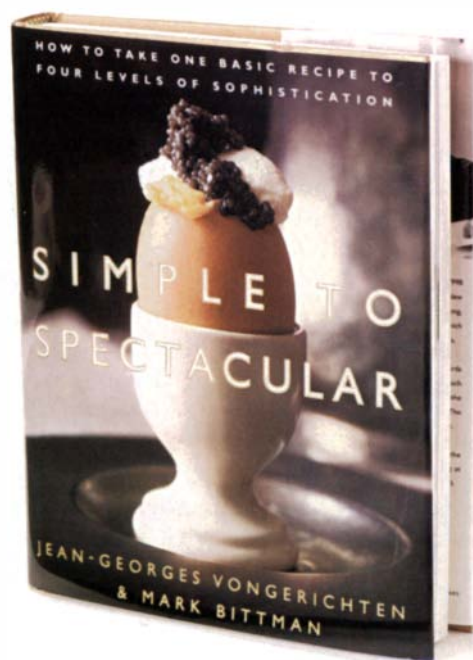
READER SERVICE NO. 10

Two books from chefs that really teach

Cookbooks written by chefs can be frustrating. Ingredient lists are often a mile long, and the directions seem to forget that we don't have a staff of prep cooks and dishwashers at our disposal. We want to cook as brilliantly as the pros, but if we have to learn this way, we might never stick with it.

Fortunately, two New York City chefs—Tom Colicchio and Jean-Georges Vongerichten—have come to the rescue with new cookbooks that emphasize mastering a basic recipe and then building on it to make something special. Both books, Colicchio's *Think Like a Chef* (Clarkson Potter, \$37.50) and Vongerichten's *Simple to Spectacular* (Broadway, \$40), are generous with tips and techniques and not overly concerned with impressive presentation and impossible-to-find ingredients. As a bonus, they both look great: a clean design, recipes contained on one page, and plenty of full-color photos make the books user-friendly.

Tom Colicchio, chef of Gramercy Tavern in New York City, is known for his clear flavors and uncomplicated approach to cooking. In the very personal introduction to the book (his first), he explains that he doesn't "create" recipes; rather he goes to the marketplace, sees what's in season and what looks best, and based on the ingredients at hand, the recipes "create" themselves. (His mantra is "what grows

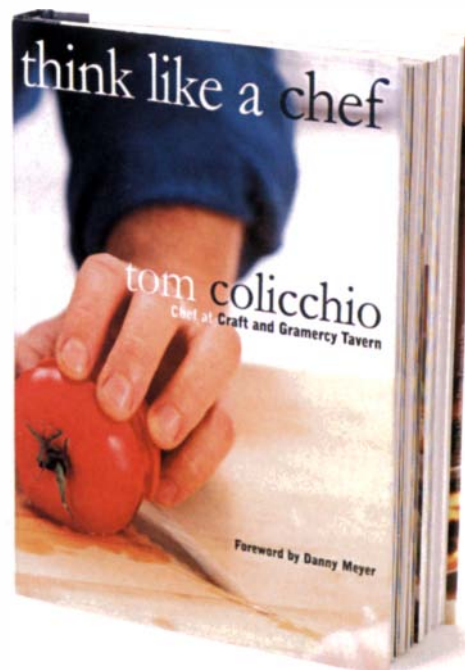


together, goes together.") By relying on the sound cooking techniques he's learned over the years to bring out the best in these seasonal ingredients, flavors are always pure and strong, and no forced or weird combinations occur.

But Colicchio doesn't leave us hanging there, thinking we can only cook like him if we have a farmers' market next door. He devotes the first five chapters to teaching important techniques. We learn to roast (brown the food on the stovetop, use moderate oven heat, add some butter to the pan, let the food rest) and braise (brown the food in a skillet, add liquid to surround but not cover, cook slowly), as well as blanch, make a stock, and make a sauce. For each technique, he includes at least a few very simple recipes (braised short ribs, roasted

chicken, basic vinaigrette) to practice with. I got a kick out of making salt-roasted salmon fillet, which I've always wanted to do, but never considered doing for individual fillets. It was easy and delicious, and the cooking time was exactly as indicated (although I like my salmon done a little more than medium rare, so I popped it back in the oven for a few more minutes).

Next, Colicchio moves on to show how to "create ingredients"—like braised artichokes and roasted tomatoes—that take some time to prepare but that become versatile staples. For instance, he gives a basic recipe for roasted tomatoes and garlic, and then shows how to use it in Roasted Tomato Risotto, in Roasted Tomato, Zucchini & Eggplant Lasagne, in Caramelized Tomato Tarts, and in



Sea Bass Stuffed with Roasted Tomatoes. I made his pan-roasted mushrooms, which were delicious, although I felt that a little more fat could have been added to the pan during the initial stovetop "roasting," since my mushrooms didn't brown as much as I would have liked.

Continuing to "build outward" from simple ingredients to finished dishes, Colicchio then goes on to organize dishes in trilogies (three ingredients together, such as lobster, peas, and pasta) and components (fall vegetables, spring vegetables) to show us how to pair ingredients. These sections are full of delicious recipes (Morel, Ramp & Potato Gratin; Lobster Risotto with Peas; Summer Vegetable Ragout; Roasted Potatoes, Leeks & Bacon) which the reader can now feel confident about making, based on all the building blocks Colicchio has given us. Here again, I had delicious results with the dishes I made, though I occasionally felt like I needed to add a bit more fat

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REVIEWS

while cooking, and that my "large" skillet might not have been as large as his was for fitting the amount of food suggested into it. I especially liked a fall vegetable dish of roasted Savoy cabbage with golden raisins.

Simple to Spectacular, the second book co-written by Jean-Georges Vongerichten (chef of Jo Jo, Jean Georges, and Mercer Kitchen, among others) and *New York Times* columnist and cookbook author Mark Bittman, is subtitled "How to Take One Basic Recipe to Four Levels of Sophistication," and the book does just that. What sounds like a gimmick is really an ingenious learning tool: Make Creamy Butternut Squash with just three ingredients, or give it a slightly deeper flavor by making it Roasted Herbed

Butternut Squash Soup; then go on to make Curried Butternut Squash Soup with Shrimp for a more elaborate dish. At every stage, you learn to treat an ingredient in a different way or add a new technique to your repertoire.

We learn to make a basic recipe— and then make something special.

This concept (which the authors apply to fifty different dishes, from scrambled eggs to tenderloin steaks) is really exciting when applied to the most basic dishes. For instance, the chapter on chicken stock begins with One-Hour Chicken Stock and goes on to include Dark Chicken Stock, Ultra-Rich

Dark Stock, and Consommé. I was really pleased with the gelatinous, pure-chicken flavor I got from the easy one-hour chicken stock based on chicken wings, and I used it to make the simplest butternut squash soup, which had an in-

credibly velvety texture. I had a little less success with the goat cheese dumplings (one of the variations) that I made to add to the basic soup. They tasted great but didn't firm up very much in the hot liquid.

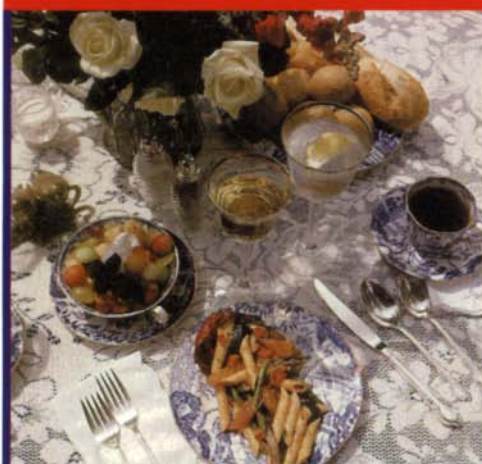
There are whole chapters devoted to popular main dish entrées, like roasted chicken, chicken breasts in foil, grilled

shrimp, sautéed fish fillets, and short ribs. I made the Short Ribs Braised in Red Wine, which takes less than a half hour to get into the oven; now I'd like to make the other ones: Short Ribs Braised with Mushrooms, Pearl Onions & Bacon; Short Ribs Braised with Citrus; Short Ribs Braised with Chinese Flavors; Stewed Short Ribs with Marrow Butter. I also like the chapters on gazpacho, buckwheat crêpes, and frisée salad.

The authors include extensive "keys to success" (tips, substitutions, other uses) with each of the 250 recipes, and lots of serving suggestions. Cooking your way through this book is like a mini cooking school education.

Susie Middleton is the managing editor of Fine Cooking. ♦

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Perfecting poached eggs

Poached eggs are a favorite around my house. Because there's no added fat in the cooking of them—the eggs out of their shell are cooked in simmering water—poached eggs show off all of the incredible flavor eggs have to offer.

I've always been puzzled by the disproportionate number of kitchen gizmos marketed around this relatively simple cooking method. With fresh eggs, a few basic pieces of equipment—a pot, a slotted spoon, a dish to crack the eggs into—and some helpful hints, achieving a luxurious poached egg is actually a relatively simple accomplishment.

Start with the freshest eggs

My idea of a perfectly poached egg is when the set white envelops the runny yolk, forming a teardrop shape. To get those results, you need to start with the freshest eggs you can get your hands on. As eggs age, a lot of things are happening inside that porous shell. Moisture and air are moving from inside the shell to the

outside environment, and vice versa. During this time, the egg white, also called the albumen, thins. You don't want a thin albumen for poached eggs because it won't hold its shape as well as a thick one. A thicker white will also cling to the yolk better. Another benefit of fresh eggs: they have a stronger yolk that's less likely to break.

To check an egg's freshness, put it (in its shell) in a large bowl of room-temperature water. As an egg ages, it loses moisture, and the air sac inside the large end of the egg shell enlarges. The swelling of the air sac increases the egg's buoyancy. Therefore, the older the egg, the higher it floats. If an egg shows more than the size of a dime above the water, it's not suitable for poaching; you might want to scramble it instead and wait to poach with fresher eggs. To keep eggs fresh, store them in the container they came in and keep them cold.

Poach the eggs straight from the fridge. Adding cold eggs to hot water is a

good move for a couple of reasons. Eggs are noticeably more viscous when cold and so will hold their shape better when added to the hot water. Also, starting with a cold egg will promote slow cooking so that the yolk will still be runny when the white is completely set.

Although you can crack the egg right into the pot of water, you'll get more consistent results by cracking the egg into a small dish or ramekin first and then pouring the egg into the pot as close to the water as possible (see the photo below).

Cook the eggs in water four inches deep. The depth of the water is an important factor for achieving the teardrop-shaped poached egg. In four inches of water, the yolk drops to the bottom of the pan with the egg white trailing above it. If the water is too shallow, the egg will look like it's been cooked over easy. Too deep, and too much of the egg white will be drawn to the top of the water.

The secret ingredient: vinegar. Adding vinegar to the water will assist in the

Gently pour cold, cracked eggs into salted, simmering water



Start with four inches of water and add vinegar and salt. Use 2 tablespoons vinegar and ½ tablespoon salt per quart of water.



Crack cold eggs into little dishes for risk-free results. This way you'll know your yolks were whole going in.



Bring the dish as close to the water as possible and gently pour all at once. Pouring from great heights will deform the egg's shape.

Cook until the whites set and then trim the tendrils



Watch the egg whites rise to the top. If a yolk bursts, leave it be; it should heal itself.



Test for doneness at 4 minutes. Gently press where the yolk and white meet; the yolk should be soft and the white set.



Trim the whites by pressing the edge of the slotted spoon against the inside of the pan.

coagulation of the egg white. Two tablespoons of vinegar to every quart of water is beneficial without any residual taste of vinegar in the egg. I also add half a tablespoon of coarse salt per quart of water, which seasons the egg lightly while also promoting coagulation.

Bring the water to just under a boil. At this beginning temperature (about 205°F), there will be small bubbles in the bottom of the pan (as well as some on the surface) that will help prevent the eggs from sticking to the bottom of the pan. The water's natural current from the bottom of the pan toward the top promotes the even coating of the yolks with the egg whites. Although this temperature is higher than normal for most poaching (fish and chicken are poached in liquids between 140°F and 185°F), eggs cook best at a higher temperature for a shorter time (four to five minutes). The higher temperature helps the egg white to set quickly and retain its shape without overcooking the yolk.

Never boil the water. This will overcoagulate the proteins and create rubbery egg whites.

Trim and dry the cooked egg. To get rid of the tail of the poached egg, trim it either by the method shown in the top right photo or by using a knife. Although trimming is mainly for cosmetic pur-

poses, drying the eggs is for flavor; water dripping from the egg will make your base soggy and will literally water down the flavor of the egg.

How many eggs you poach is a matter of how well you can keep up with them. Four eggs poaching in a four-quart pan at one time is reasonable even for those new to poaching. If you want to cook more in a larger pot, the trick will be keeping track of the eggs as they finish cooking. By the time you get the tenth egg in there, the first may be overcooked.

But you can cook poached eggs ahead of serving them. Restaurants do this all the time. If you're cooking for a crowd, poach eggs in batches ahead of time; you'll get more evenly cooked eggs than if you try to poach a dozen at once. Poach the eggs until they're just slightly underdone and then immediately transfer them to a bowl of ice and water to stop the cooking. They can actually remain in the cold water, refrigerated, overnight. Just before serving them, reheat them in salted simmering water for about a minute.

Beyond eggs Benedict. There are many ways to serve poached eggs, and they needn't be reserved only for brunch. What comes to mind first is eggs Benedict, consisting of a toasted English muffin half topped with a slice of ham or

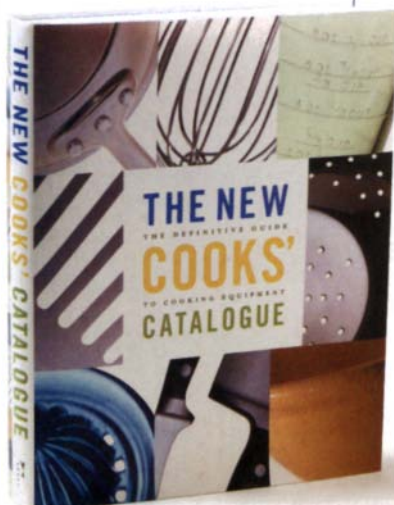
Dry the eggs or you'll be soggy



Gently blot the egg dry with a folded paper towel or linen dishtowel.

Canadian bacon, a poached egg, and a dollop of Hollandaise sauce. But a delicious variation of that classic is to serve the eggs with some cured salmon and sautéed spinach along with the buttery sauce. Poached eggs are also a traditional topping for pizza, pasta, and firm polenta.

Robert Danhi is a chef-instructor at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. ♦



A bible for equipment nuts (like you and me)

The New Cooks' Catalogue (Knopf, \$35), chef Burt Wolf's updated version of his 1975 classic compendium of useful cooking equipment, is like a fantasy walk

through the ultimate cookware store. With a clean, easy-to-read layout featuring useful writeups and photos of more than a thousand pieces of brand-name cooking equipment, this book is a great place to start shopping, whether you're in the market for a candy thermometer or a copper pot. You might think owning a reference guide like this would only come in handy every once in a while, but I found the book educational just to read through (the amusing *New Yorker* cartoons and recipes sprinkled throughout help, too). The chapters on pots and pans and knives are especially valuable, though I enjoyed reading about smaller gadgets like spaetzle makers, too.

—Susie Middleton, managing editor



Bulk bargains on the Web

If you love a bargain, visit

www.gourmetresource.com. This site

is like a warehouse club, but instead of ramen noodle multipacks and 1,000-count boxes of trash bags, this warehouse stocks all manner of gourmet specialty foods at below-retail prices. As with other warehouses, the catch is that you generally have to buy in bulk.

I ordered the dry mushroom "forestiere" mix, a 1-pound combination of porcini, black trumpets, wood ears, chanterelles, and shiitakes. The mushrooms arrived in good condition on the day they were promised (via e-mail confirmation), and they were so aromatic that I could smell them through the sealed plastic bag.

A pound of dried mushrooms is a lot of mushrooms, but buying in this quantity saved me about 75% off small-batch retail prices. (I paid \$23 plus \$7 in shipping for the 1-pound bag). If you can't imagine needing 10 pounds of dried calypso beans or 5 kilos of fresh buffalo mozzarella, consider getting a group of friends together and placing a joint order.

—Jennifer Armentrout, assistant editor

Have your color and cook well, too

Up until now, you could have a colorful pot or a hard-anodized aluminum pot, but not both. Now the Meyer company, makers of Circulon and other cookware, has developed the technology for bonding colorful enamel to hard-anodized cookware. The result, called Circulon Style, is a line of bright red-, blue-, yellow-, and black-coated pots and pans that

also offer even heat distribution and the trademark ridged Circulon nonstick interior. I love the color and the solid construction of the pots and pans; I only wish the color coating could have been extended all the way around the bottom of the pan. Unfortunately, Meyer was unable to do that, because while the enamel will stay permanently bonded to the anodized aluminum, it could still scratch if it comes into contact with a metal cooking

grate. And, while I like to have one nonstick skillet, I'd love to have these pots in a stainless interior, too.

Circulon Style has another unique feature that I hope the company will consider extending to its other lines: an ingenious stay-cool handle on the pot lids. The S-shaped handle is tapered in thickness, so heat gradually dissipates before it can reach your hand. This really works: I cooked a steamy pot of pasta sauce, left the lid on for a good bit, and found the handle cool to the touch.

The new line of cookware includes saucepans, skillets, covered sauté pans, and a fondue set. The 12-inch, 5-quart covered sauté pans pictured here are \$129 each; an eight-piece set of Circulon Style is \$299. Circulon Style is available in major department stores like Macy's, Hecht's, Rich's, Dayton's, and Marshall Fields, as well as Bed, Bath & Beyond and Linens'n Things. For more information, visit www.circulon.com or call 800/326-3933.

—S.M.

Photos: Scott Phillips



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Lightweight but heavy-duty roaster cleans easily, too

I love my giant roasting pan, but sometimes I want something smaller for a weeknight batch of roasted vegetables or for one of my favorite casseroles like baked enchiladas, vegetable lasagna, cannelloni, or shepherd's pie. And since my husband—the designated dishwasher in our house—is always complaining about baked-on greasy stuff, I've also been looking for a good-quality nonstick baking pan. Now Berndes, the German cookware manufacturer, has come out with just the pan I need. It's not cheap—retailing for \$80—but it could see a lot of use in my kitchen. What's nice about this cast-aluminum cookware is that it's both lightweight (you'll be surprised when you pick it up) and heavy-duty at the same time (the thick base conducts heat evenly). This small (8x13-inch) roaster is coated with the three-layer nonstick DuPont Autograph coating (guaranteed not to chip, blister, or crack), which not only makes food come out of the pan more easily, but it also makes clean-up much faster. The roasting pan (Berndes calls it a lasagna pan) will be available at Bloomingdale's and at kitchen stores nationwide. For more information, visit www.berndes.com or call Berndes at 888/266-5983.

—S. M.

A fine olive oil at an extra-fine price

If you like olive oil that's smooth, rich, earthy, and fruity, you'll be very pleased with Unio extra-virgin olive oil from Catalonia in the northeastern part of Spain. Pressed from tiny Arbequina olives, Unio has a sweetly grassy aroma and a mellow, buttery flavor with a slight hint of pepper. It's also very nicely priced at about \$10 for a 750ml (25.4-ounce) bottle). Unio pairs wonderfully with all the foods that you're used to flavoring with top-notch olive oil (green salads, pasta sauces, good bread, grilled vegetables), and I've even dared to cook with it. I know the rule—"use your best olive oils as a condiment rather

than a cooking medium"—but Unio can handle a bit of heat. And at such a great price, I can afford to live dangerously. Simple dishes like roasted potatoes and fried eggs benefit the most.

Unio olive oil is sold at many gourmet food stores and high-end supermarkets, such as Fresh Fields, Bread & Circus, and some Whole Foods stores. To find a shop in your area, call The Cheeseworks (800/962-1220). You can also order Unio from Pasta Shop Fine Foods (www.rockridgemarkethall.com or 510/547-4005), or through www.tavolo.com.

—Sarah Jay, associate editor



Sauté over high heat with toasty, delicious ghee from a jar



Ghee, the Indian version of clarified butter, is a rich, golden oil with a nutty flavor. Like clarified butter, ghee has a higher smoking point than butter, which makes it great for sautéing. But unlike clarified butter, which has a neutral flavor, ghee (pronounced with a hard G) adds its own delicious, slightly caramelized flavor to foods. (The flavor comes from toasting the milk solids before they're removed from the butter.) You can make ghee yourself, but a delicious commercial version available from The Baker's Catalogue (www.kingarthurflour.com or 800/827-6836) means you don't have to. A 13-ounce jar costs \$10.95.

I use this ghee when sautéing vegetables and making omelets—I especially like using it to cook mushrooms, which want a high heat that whole butter can't cope with. I also love to mix ghee into steamed basmati rice. It makes a tender, flaky dough for the Indian turnovers called *samosas*, and I imagine it would work well in other baked goods.

Ghee is easiest to scoop out of the jar at room temperature and will keep that way for two months. It keeps longer in the fridge, but it will harden and you'll need to scrape it to use it.

—Joanne Smart, associate editor

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Making sense of American wine regions

If you've spent time trying wines from a particular region (especially a European one), you probably know that most wine-producing countries have a system to classify their wines and help consumers know what they're buying. The French *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* system (AOC), established in 1935, was the first of such schemes, with other countries following suit.

We too have an official system here in the U.S. to classify our wine-growing regions, officially known as American Viticultural Areas, or AVAs. The AVA system, put into place in the early 1980s, isn't as strict, as detailed, or as developed as its Old World counterparts, but it is law. Here's how AVA provisions affect what's in the bottle—and how they matter to you, the wine drinker.

Here are the rules

While in most countries, winemaking is overseen by the government's agricultural office, American winemaking and AVAs are policed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms, or BATF. (This is controversial, and many in the wine industry hope to return wine to more agriculturally geared supervision.) The laws stipulate:

- ◆ that 85% of the grapes used to make the wine must come from the designated appellation (for example, the Oregon AVA Willamette Valley) that appears on the label.
- ◆ that if the label lists a single varietal (like Pinot Noir), 75% of the grapes in the wine must be that grape.
- ◆ that if a vineyard designation is used (Ken Wright Cellars Freedom Hill Vineyard, for example), 95 percent of

the grapes must come from that designated vineyard.

◆ that if a wine is labeled as coming from a particular vineyard "estate" (known as estate-bottled), the wine must be grown, produced, and bottled at the property whose name appears on the label. The winery must grow the grapes itself or manage all vineyard sources used to produce the wine. "Estate" is the highest designation an American wine can carry, and it's an

indication of artisan-quality expertise and care.

Designed for consumer protection

Though wine classifications can be confusing and many would prefer that the government be more hands-off, AVA designations can be helpful in a couple of ways.

Appellation rules prevent misuse of place names. The Napa Valley appellation, for instance, is considered supe-

AVAs across the U.S.

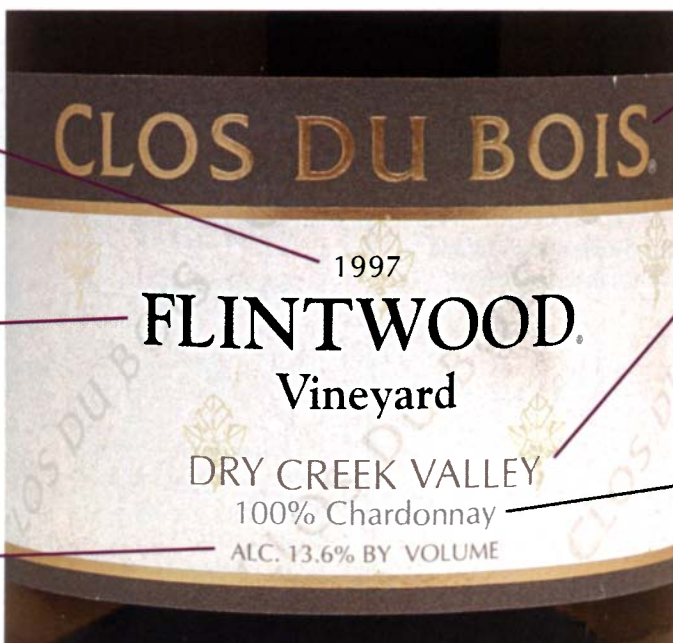
California isn't the only state with American Viticultural Areas, although it does contain more than half the 139 AVAs currently recognized by the BATF. Other states containing AVAs include:

Arkansas	Maryland	New Mexico	Rhode Island
Colorado	Massachusetts	New York	Tennessee
Connecticut	Michigan	Ohio	Texas
Indiana	Mississippi	Oklahoma	Virginia
Kentucky	Missouri	Oregon	Washington
Louisiana	New Jersey	Pennsylvania	West Virginia

1997 is the year the grapes were harvested, crushed, and laid down to ferment and age.

Flintwood Vineyard is a single-vineyard designation. It means that 95 percent of the grapes in the wine have come from that vineyard.

An alcohol level marking is required by the BATF, or else the label must be marked "table wine."



Clos du Bois is the name of the winery.

Dry Creek Valley is the AVA in which the vineyard is planted.

100% Chardonnay indicates the percentage of grapes used in the wine. The vineyard isn't required to mark this, but it has chosen to in order to show that the wine isn't a blend, and to appeal to Chardonnay lovers.

rior to the Napa County appellation because of better vineyard sites and better fruit. So, a label marked "Napa Valley" probably means a finished wine that's higher quality than one marked "Napa County."

Appellation names can clue you in to a wine's style. In California, a dizzyingly diverse range of wines is being made in equally diverse growing conditions. Generalizing is tricky, but an appellation can be an indicator of flavor. A Chardonnay from Napa tastes different from one from Mendocino, just as Chablis tastes different from Puligny-Montrachet, even though both are made from Chardonnay grapes grown in Burgundy.

Wineries have a stake, too Designations also can also protect growers and vintners.

An appellation distinction can mean more revenue for a vineyard or a winery because a more selective designation nets the grower more money for the grapes, and it lets the winery ask a higher price for the wine.

Place names are a marketing tool. While a vintner

with a proven record may not feel the need to put an AVA on the label, an up-and-coming winemaker might want to in order to help establish a reputation. That said, a wine needn't carry an AVA to be a good wine. Again, some established vintners opt not to include district names on the

label. And many make great wine by blending grapes from several different districts, but if what's in the bottle doesn't meet the grape percentage requirement for AVA declaration, the AVA name can't appear on the label. ZD Chardonnay, for example, is a great California Chardonnay that carries no AVA; it's a blend of grapes from several different AVAs.

American winemakers are working hard to raise the industry standard so that American regions gain some of the cachet and pride of place associated with them that Old World wine regions have, such as Bordeaux, Piedmont, or Mosel-Saar-Ruwer.

Tim Gaiser is a master sommelier and a wine buyer for wine.com. ♦

What determines an AVA?

Although anyone can petition the BATF to define a new appellation or to change the rules of an existing one, it's usually winery or vineyard owners who do.

Climate, rainfall, soil type, temperature, and elevation are some of the criteria for delineating a new AVA. The potential boundaries—mountain, river, valley, coast—must be readily visible on a U.S. Geological Survey Map. Geographic features and boundaries, such as state lines, county lines, highways, and byways are considered, too, if important.

AVAs can reach over state lines. The huge Ohio River Valley AVA, for instance, extends far beyond the valley itself and includes Indiana, West Virginia, and Kentucky, as well as Ohio.



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Scissors chop canned tomatoes

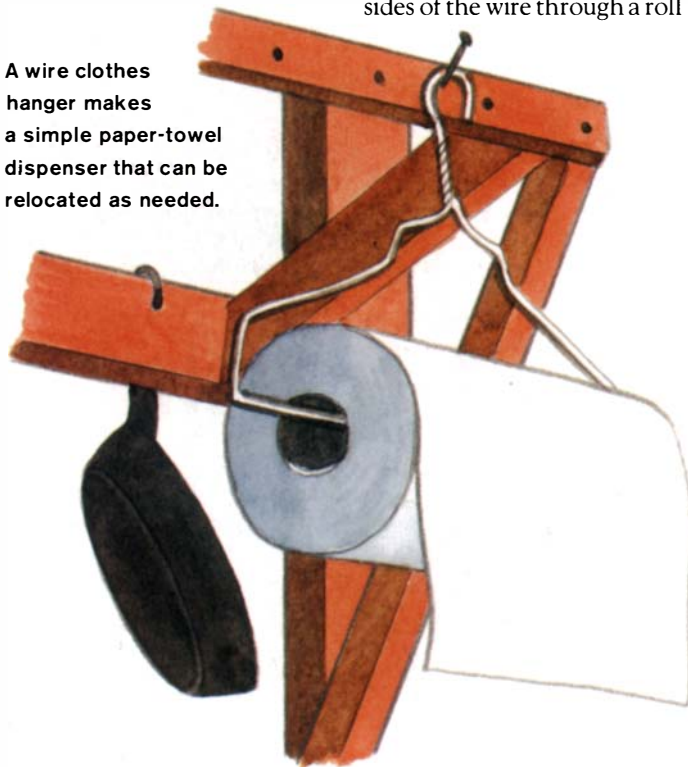
I have found that you can do a fairly speedy and tidy job of chopping whole canned tomatoes by using kitchen shears. Rather than chop the tomatoes on a board, I keep them in the can. First pour off the juices, and then insert the shears into the can and start cutting up the tomatoes. For large cans, you have to chop the tomatoes in the top half of the can, remove them, and then chop those in the bottom.

—Jeannie McDermott,
Roeland Park, KS

Clothes hanger as paper towel holder

My paper towel dispenser is the most low-tech system imaginable: a wire clothes hanger. It's easy to make and use. Use wire cutters to snip the hanger in the middle of the bottom side (the longest side of the triangle). Slip both sides of the wire through a roll

A wire clothes hanger makes a simple paper-towel dispenser that can be relocated as needed.



To chop whole canned tomatoes without making a mess, use scissors to cut them right in the can.

of paper towel. The paper towel rolls easily, and you can move the hanger wherever it's most convenient. I keep mine hanging on a hook off my pot rack.

—Barbara Hom,
Night Owl Catering,
Sebastopol, CA

How to unwrap a roll of plastic wrap

When I can't find the edge on a roll of plastic wrap, I rub a bit of flour around the roll. The flour catches along the hidden edge and helps you grab it.

—Abby Muller,
Newport News, VA

Frozen cold packs have many purposes

When I'm making a custard, an Italian meringue, or any food that needs to be cooled quickly, I use a first-aid cold pack that I always keep in my freezer. I prefer the pack to ice cubes since it doesn't melt or leak, and it's easy to hold in

my hand (with a dishtowel). I can also set a bowl on top of the pack and stir a mixture to cool it. For Italian meringue, I rub the pack along the bottom of the bowl of my stand mixer.

—Hillary Thagard,
via e-mail

Add butter at the end of sautéing

When I'm sautéing vegetables like mushrooms or zucchini over high heat, I use either olive oil or clarified butter (since whole unclarified butter would burn). But to get the buttery flavor without going through the fuss of clarifying it, I sometimes cheat: I sauté with oil but then add in butter at the end of cooking.

—Ian Folger,
Chicago, IL

Rolling pin rack

To keep my six rolling pins from rolling around in my cabinet, I've converted a rack that's meant to hold waxed paper and aluminum foil into a special rolling pin rack. The "wrap stacker" is made of plastic-coated heavy wire. My cabinet is now better organized and I have easy access to the pins.

—Fran Datko,
Weston, FL

Before juicing a lemon, remove the zest

To get the most out of my lemons, limes, and oranges, I use a vegetable peeler to remove all the zest before squeezing the fruit for juice. If I don't need the zest right away, it goes into a plastic freezer bag. I find that citrus is easier to juice (especially limes) without the zest, and the frozen peel can be used later in recipes, as garnishes,

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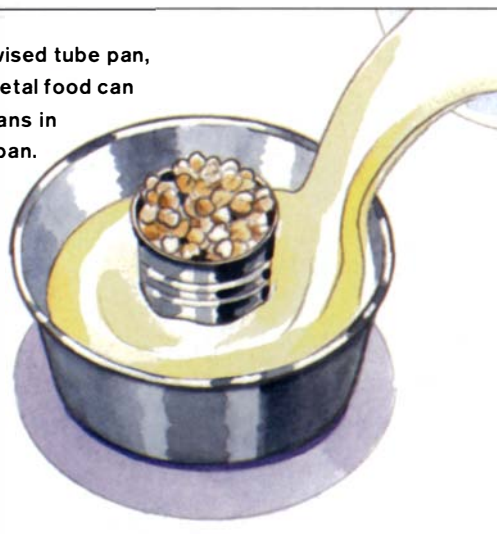
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For an improvised tube pan, set a clean metal food can filled with beans in a deep cake pan.



in beverages, or even to freshen the disposal. The large strips thaw quickly and they keep far better in the freezer than grated zest.

—Kathleen Wolf,
Milpitas, CA

Steam clams and save the “liquor”

After steaming clams or mussels, there’s always 1 or 2 cups of highly flavored liquid left in the steaming pot. Don’t toss it out. Instead, carefully pour it into a reusable plastic container (leaving behind any sediment), let it cool, seal it, label it, and freeze it. Next time you’re making rice or couscous, use the clam or mussel “liquor” instead of water for a flavor boost.

—John Delzani,
Lakewood, OH

A trivet in a pinch

For those times when I need one more trivet than I have available, I improvise one with aluminum foil. I scrunch up the foil into a long, 1-inch-thick rod and then I shape it into a ring or a Z-shape. It may not be very attractive, but it does the job.

—Chef Robert Danhi,
Culinary Institute of America,
Hyde Park, NY

Improvising a tube pan for cakes

I don’t own a tube pan, but that doesn’t keep me from making cakes that call for one. To improvise my own tube pan, I set an empty, clean metal food can in the center of a deep cake pan. I fill the can with beans so it’s heavy and doesn’t move around. Then I grease the pan and can as the recipe instructs and pour in the cake batter around the can.

—Florence Sarnoff,
New York, NY

Try chilling vinegar

I keep my vinegars in the refrigerator because I find that they whisk more easily into olive oil that way. It also seems to keep them fresher longer.

—Alice Weinstock,
via e-mail

Candy molds for a pretty pat of butter

I collect small, flexible candy molds at second-hand shops and rummage sales, and I use them to mold butter into pretty shapes for parties or special events. I let the butter soften before pressing it into the molds; then I refrigerate or freeze it until firm again. The molds are so flexible that the butter pops right out. Molds have seasonal designs and themes, and this is a fun, easy way to make a party interesting.

—Melanie Walton,
East Hampton, CT

It slices, it dices...

For perfectly sliced mushrooms in a flash, I use my egg slicer. Set the mushroom on its side (stem pointing toward you) and slice. Some of the

slices will stick together, but they’re easy to separate. The egg slicer also comes in handy for shredding packaged mozzarella (not fresh) for pizzas. Put an egg-size chunk into the slicer, slice, turn the cheese 90 degrees, slice again, and voilà—perfect shreds. You can even turn the cheese once more and slice to create a beautiful dice.

—Jennifer Winston,
Fishkill, NY

Rinse pasta sauce jars with a bit of wine

If you use pasta sauce from a jar (and who doesn’t, on occasion?), rinse the jar with a little good red wine, such as Cabernet, Merlot, or Zinfandel, and add it to the sauce as it’s heating. The wine helps get all of the sauce out of the jar, and it adds more flavor to the finished sauce.

—Lilian Fischer,
Salt Lake City, UT

Store trash bags at the bottom of the trash bin

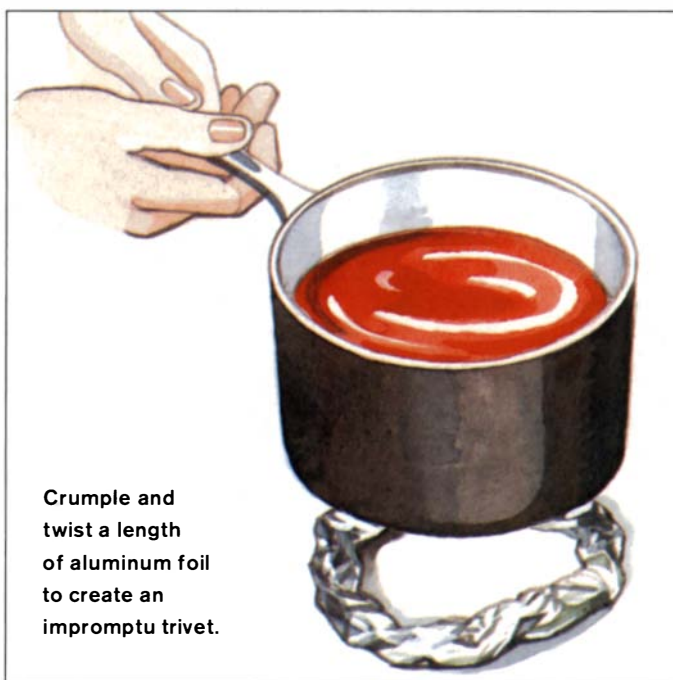
To save time and storage space, I store clean trash bags at the bottom of the trash container, underneath the bag that’s in current use. They don’t take up much room, and I never have to search for the bags.

—Lega Sammut Medcalf,
Limington, ME

Save those empty wine bottles

After finishing a bottle of wine, consider recycling the bottle as a container for olive oil. Put a pour spout in the top (the kind bartenders use in liquor bottles) and you have a convenient storage container that’s much easier to work with than a cumbersome gallon tin of oil.

—Mark L. Heller,
Dallas, TX ♦



Crumple and twist a length of aluminum foil to create an impromptu trivet.

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Soup of the Bakony Outlaws



Cucumber Salad



Chicken Paprikás

A Menu of Hungarian Classics

Easy-to-find ingredients come together in four comforting, do-ahead winter dishes, with just a hint of the exotic

BY RANDALL PRICE



Walnut & Rum-Raisin Crêpes with Whipped-Cream Chocolate Sauce

Hungarian cooking has retained its identity perhaps better than any other cuisine in Eastern Europe, yet its pleasures remain unknown or underrated in the West, outside of our pale interpretations of “goulash” (although I’m starting to notice Hungarian inspired dishes on some top restaurant menus, notably David Bouley’s Danube in New York City). In the late ’80s, I was lucky enough to work a two-year stint as the chef to the U.S. ambassador in Budapest. Despite the challenges of getting ingredients in what was then a Communist bloc country, I gradually discovered many of the secrets of Hungarian cooking, and I became a passionate convert to the Joys of Paprika.

Hungarian cooking is not light and lean by any means, but I find these rich and complex dishes perfect for entertaining during the cold months of winter. Sour cream is the favored dairy product to lighten—paradoxically—and refine a dish. I think you’ll find that the small amount of sour cream in the chicken dish doesn’t make it feel overly “creamy,” but rather gives tang and body to the sauce, which becomes a deeply flavored, deeply colored glossy coating.

Rich Hungarian sour cream differs from American sour cream, but our kind works perfectly well if a bit of flour is mixed in to prevent it from curdling when heated. You’ll notice that I call for simmering these dishes even after I’ve added the sour cream, but there’s no risk of breaking the sauce.

Here are some very authentic Hungarian dishes to take you beyond goulash and introduce you to the subtleties of refined Hungarian cooking. Please don’t be daunted by what look to be long recipes in some cases—the techniques are straightforward, and many of the elements can be prepared in advance. The soup is even better the day after it’s made, and the dessert can be broken down into do-ahead tasks: make the crêpes way ahead and freeze them, make the filling and the chocolate sauce base a day or two ahead—all you’ll need to do at dinner time is reheat the crêpes in a little butter and fold the whipped cream into the chocolate sauce. I told you this wasn’t low-fat cooking, but I promise you that it’s delicious.



Release the flavors of paprika by sautéing it in some oil before adding any liquid.

Make this soup even better by preparing it a day ahead, so the flavors can mellow and blend.



Pick a pack of paprika

To appreciate the Hungarian penchant for paprika, you need to understand that it isn't a mere sprinkling of tasteless color but a crucial seasoning measured in heaping spoons rather than pinches. Heating paprika in fat releases and develops its flavor, and the combination of lard, paprika, and onion starts many Hungarian dishes.

For genuine flavor in these recipes, imported Hungarian paprika is the best choice. The finest paprika traditionally comes from Szeged and Kalocsa, cities in the south of Hungary where soil and climatic conditions are ideal for the growing of this delicate plant.

Paprika is classified into six categories, from delicate (*kulanleges*) to fiery hot (*eros*). The amount of heat the finished paprika has depends mostly on how many of the ribs are removed before grinding the dried pods, although actual "sweet" varieties of the plant have been developed. Every cook in Hungary has a favored paprika for any particular dish and may use several types in different dishes in a single meal.

In the U.S., we usually just get two categories—sweet and hot. If you don't see imported paprika on your market shelves, try one of the mail-order sources on p. 84.

Soup of the Bakony Outlaws

Bakony is a mountainous region near Lake Balaton, and the outlaws must have been both gourmet and gourmand to inspire this hearty, flavorful soup. I've seen other "Bakony" recipes, and mushrooms seem to be the common bond. Maybe they were roving mushroom thieves. You'll notice that many of the ingredients are diced pretty fine, which gives the soup a wonderful texture and lots of flavor, but if you need to save some time, you can chop a bit more coarsely, though you should keep the bacon and veal very small. *Serves four as a meal or eight as a first course.*

- 3 Tbs. oil**
- 2 onions, cut in ¼-inch dice**
- 2 oz. bacon, cut in ¼-inch dice**
- 1½ Tbs. sweet paprika (see Sources, p. 84)**
- 8 oz. thin veal cutlet, cut in ¼-inch dice**
- 2 to 3 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**
- 2 medium carrots, cut in ¼-inch dice**
- 2 medium turnips, cut in ¼-inch dice**
- 8 oz. mushrooms, cut in ¼-inch dice**
- 2 medium potatoes, cut in ¼-inch dice**
- 2 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and cut in ¼-inch dice or 4 canned seeded, chopped tomatoes**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 cup sour cream**
- 2 Tbs. all-purpose flour**
- 1 cup heavy cream or *crème fraîche***
- 3 Tbs. snipped fresh dill, plus small sprigs for decoration**

Heat the oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven and cook the onions and bacon over medium heat until the onions start to color, 10 to 15 min. Stir in the paprika and cook, stirring, another 2 min. to release and develop its flavor. Add the veal and just enough stock to cover it. Cover the pan and simmer for 20 min.

Add the carrots, turnips, mushrooms, potatoes, tomatoes, and more stock, reserving about 1 cup; don't worry if the liquid doesn't cover the vegetables at this point. Season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer until the vegetables are tender, another 20 min. Add a little more stock if the soup looks too dry during cooking, bearing in mind that more liquid will be added later.

Put the sour cream in a small bowl and stir in the flour with a fork or whisk; stir in the cream. Pour this into the soup and bring it to a boil, stirring constantly. Simmer for 2 min. Taste and adjust the salt and pepper. Just before serving, stir in the chopped fresh dill and toss some sprigs on top for decoration, if you like.

Chicken Paprikás

While old-school Hungarian cooks would use lard instead of oil and probably double the amount of sour cream, this somewhat lighter version is equally delicious and more to American tastes. *Serves four.*

- 1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock**
- 3 Tbs. oil**
- ½ cup chopped onion**
- 2 Tbs. sweet paprika (see Sources, p. 84)**

Do-ahead tips

Spreading the work over a few days makes this menu a cinch to produce.

- ◆ Up to 1 month ahead: Make and freeze the crêpes.
- ◆ 2 days ahead: Make the soup; make the filling for the crêpes.
- ◆ 1 day ahead: Make the chicken paprikás.
- ◆ The morning of the dinner: Fill and fold the crêpes; make the cucumber salad; make the chocolate sauce base.
- ◆ Just before dinner: Reheat the soup; reheat the paprikás (in a 350°F oven in a covered casserole).
- ◆ Just before dessert: Fry the crêpes to warm them; whip the cream; finish the chocolate sauce.



Make sour cream curdleproof by stirring in a bit of flour. The starch keeps the milk proteins from coagulating.



- 1 3-lb. chicken, cut into four pieces, or 2½ lb. chicken pieces (thighs work nicely)**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 large green bell pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped into ½-inch pieces**
- 1 large tomato, peeled, seeded, and chopped or 3 canned seeded, chopped tomatoes**
- 1 Tbs. flour**
- ½ cup sour cream**

Put the stock in a small saucepan, bring to a boil, and reduce by half to concentrate the flavor.

Heat the oil in a deep skillet or sauté pan large enough to hold the chicken pieces snugly. Add the onion; cook over high heat, stirring frequently, until deep golden brown, 6 to 8 min. It should be well colored but not burned. Reduce the heat slightly, add the paprika, and stir for a few minutes to develop the flavor.

Season the chicken pieces well with salt and pepper and add them to the pan, skin side down. Brown them well over medium high, about 7 min. on each side. Add the reduced stock and scrape up any browned bits on the bottom of the pan. Turn the heat to low, cover the pan, and let it simmer about 15 min. Add the green pepper and tomato (and a little water if the pan seems dry—Hungarians would say the chicken should almost fry instead of “swim,” so don’t add too much stock). Replace the lid and simmer until the chicken is very tender when pierced with a fork, about 25 min. longer, turning the pieces once during cooking.

Transfer the chicken pieces to a dish and keep them warm while you finish the sauce. Spoon off as much grease as you can. Bring the sauce to a boil and boil for a few minutes to concentrate the flavors even more. Stir the flour into the sour cream with a fork or whisk and then whisk this into the sauce. Simmer for about 4 min. to cook away any floury taste and to bring the flavors together; taste and adjust the salt and pepper if necessary. Return the chicken pieces to the pan to reheat and coat them with the sauce.

Serve with boiled potatoes, rice, or the Hungarian accompaniment, which would be *galushka*, tiny egg noodles or dumplings that are similar to spaetzle.

Cucumber Salad

This simple and refreshing salad is a pleasing foil for the rich chicken. *Serves four.*

- 2 medium cucumbers, peeled and sliced very thin**
- 1 Tbs. salt**
- ½ small Vidalia or other sweet onion or 1 small yellow onion, sliced very thin**
- 4 tsp. red-wine vinegar**
- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 Tbs. snipped fresh dill**

Put the cucumbers in a colander and sprinkle with about 1½ tsp. of the salt, tossing to distribute evenly. Put the onion in a small bowl and sprinkle with the remaining 1½ tsp. salt, adding about 1 tsp. of the vinegar as well—the salt and vinegar will mellow the bite of the raw onion. Let the vegetables stand for at least

Don't be timid about browning everything well—onion, paprika, and chicken—to get the best flavor.

Get ready to pour and tilt at the same time, which helps the crêpe batter spread well in the hot pan.



½ cup golden raisins
 ½ cup heavy cream
 ½ cup sugar
 1¼ cups walnut halves, coarsely chopped
 2 Tbs. chopped candied orange peel or ½ tsp. grated orange zest
 ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
 1 Tbs. cocoa powder
 Pinch salt

FOR THE SAUCE:

¼ cup cocoa powder
 ½ cup sugar
 2 tsp. all-purpose flour
 Pinch salt
 1 cup milk
 3 oz. semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
 ½ cup heavy cream

To make the crêpes—Whisk the eggs with the cold milk, sparkling water, and salt. Whisking steadily, sift the flour over the egg mixture in a gradual but steady “rain” to make a smooth batter. Let sit for 20 min. and then add more sparkling water if necessary to get the consistency of heavy cream.

Heat a 6- to 8-inch crêpe or omelet pan (nonstick is fine but not necessary). Brush the pan with melted butter. Tilting and turning the pan with one hand, pour in just enough batter to cover the pan’s surface, about 3 Tbs. Let the crêpe cook until golden on the underside, 1 to 2 min. (don’t undercook them) and then flip or turn the crêpe with a small spatula or your fingers to cook the other side until just set, about 30 seconds more. The side cooked first will be prettier and should be the outer side when filling the crêpes.

Adjust the heat so you get a definite sizzle when adding the batter, and thin the batter if the crêpes are too thick and flabby. Stack the finished crêpes on a plate as you go. Cover with plastic and refrigerate until using, up to three days ahead. You can also wrap the crêpes tightly and freeze them (put a piece of waxed paper between each one for easier separation).

To make the filling—Heat the rum and soak the raisins in it while assembling the other ingredients. In a small saucepan, bring the cream and sugar to a boil, stirring, and add the walnuts, candied orange peel (or zest), cinnamon, cocoa powder, and salt. Bring back to a boil, stirring, and cook until the liquid has reduced almost completely but the nuts are still well coated and glossy, about 3 min. Stir in the raisins and rum and cool. You can make this filling a day or two ahead and refrigerate it until time to use.

For the chocolate sauce—In a medium saucepan, combine the cocoa powder, sugar, flour, and salt. Whisking steadily, slowly pour in the milk to make a smooth paste. Bring the mixture to a boil and cook about 30 seconds to cook off the raw floury taste, and then remove from the heat and add the chopped chocolate. Stir until smooth, cover loosely with plastic, and cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally to help it cool and prevent a skin from forming. Just before serving the crêpes, whip the cream until it just forms soft peaks. Stir about one-quarter of the whipped cream into the chocolate to lighten it, and then carefully fold the rest of the whipped cream into the sauce until well blended.



Cook the crêpes three-quarters of the way before you flip to get a pretty, browned surface.

10 min. and up to 30 min. and then rinse them in cool water and gently squeeze out excess moisture, blotting with paper towels if necessary.

Mix the cucumbers and onions. Add the oil, the remaining 1 Tbs. vinegar and a good grind of fresh pepper. Taste and add more vinegar if you like. Toss well with the dill. Chill for at least 30 min. and serve chilled as a condiment-type salad with the chicken.

Walnut & Rum-Raisin Crêpes with Whipped-Cream Chocolate Sauce

These crêpes, known as *gundel paliscinta*, are deep, dark, and delicious, and the sauce is both unusual and outstanding—the whipped cream folded in at the end gives it an amazing texture. In many Hungarian restaurants, these crêpes are flamed with Grand Marnier when presented. While it is a dramatic touch, I really think it’s gilding the lily. *Yields about 20 crêpes, with filling for 18, and 2 cups sauce.*

FOR THE CRÊPES:

2 large eggs
 ½ cup cold milk
 ½ cup cold sparkling water; more as needed
 ½ tsp. salt
 6¼ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
 Melted butter for frying the crêpes

FOR THE FILLING:

½ cup dark rum



Loosen up the chocolate base with a whiskful of whipped cream...



...and then gently fold the chocolate into the rest of the cream for a sauce with an amazing texture.

To finish—Spread about 2 Tbs. of the filling on the underside of a crêpe (reheat the filling slightly if it's cold from the refrigerator). Fold the crêpe in half, and then in half again to make a quarter circle. Repeat with the remaining crêpes, dividing the filling evenly. You can do this early on the day of serving and just keep the filled crêpes covered at room temperature.

In a large frying pan, heat 2 Tbs. of butter over medium heat until sizzling. Add the filled crêpes to the pan without crowding them (do this in batches if you need to). Cook the crêpes until warmed through and browned on each side, about 1 min. per side. Add more butter if necessary to the pan during cooking.

Arrange 3 crêpes on each plate and drizzle a generous ribbon of chocolate sauce on top, passing more sauce at the table. Serve immediately.



Fill the crêpes before dinner, sauté them in a little butter at serving time, and drizzle them with the creamy chocolate sauce to finish.

Randall Price is an Ohio-born private chef and cooking teacher who divides his time between Paris, Burgundy, and the Auvergne. ♦



wine choices

Try spicy reds, intense whites, and a fortified wine to finish

The Soup of the Bakony Outlaws can be brought to justice with a medium-bodied red wine with some spice. Cline's '97 "Ancient Vines," a California Mourvèdre (\$18), has oak and eucalyptus aromas, impressive black fruit flavors, and moderate tannins that provide a deliciously

intense foil for the soup.

Chicken Paprikás marries perfectly with either white or red wine. Look for a white with intensity to match the creamy richness of the dish as well as crisp acidity to cut that richness, like Hugel's aromatic, dry '96 Gewürztraminer "Jubilee" (about \$32). Or try a medium-

bodied, dry red with mature red-fruit flavors, like the '96 José Sousa from Portugal's Reguegnos district (\$13).

The rich, complex crêpes need the drama of a very sweet fortified wine. Try an oft-overlooked choice from Cyprus called Commandaria (\$12), deliciously fragrant

with cocoa aromas. Pedro Ximénez sherry or a ten-year-old tawny port would work well, too—as would strong, freshly brewed black coffee.

Steven Kolpan is a professor of wine studies at the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park, New York.

Here's the first of a new *Fine Cooking* series designed to help you master a simple technique so that you can improvise your own dishes without a recipe.

Simple Sautés Make Quick & Flavorful Dinners

Master a few steps to sauté and sauce chicken, pork, or turkey cutlets—without using a recipe

BY PAM ANDERSON

Not many years ago, if someone had asked me to make sautéed chicken breasts with a mustard cream sauce, or turkey cutlets with a port wine cherry sauce, or boneless pork chops with a balsamic vinegar pan sauce, I'd have said, "Sounds great—give me the recipe."

But cooking these same cuts night after night, I began to see the similarities in their preparation and cooking, as well as in the pan sauces I made to flavor them. After all, I seasoned and floured them the same way. I heated the same quantity of fat in the same size pan for my family of four. I cooked them for about the same amount of time. And when they came out of the skillet, I added the same kinds of liquids to make a pan sauce. I ultimately realized I didn't need individual recipes for these various cuts. I just needed to internalize two techniques—one for sautéing and another for saucemaking.



Give chicken cutlets breathing room. Four fit nicely in a 12-inch skillet, with room for tenderloins, too.

A little trimming with a knife, and you've got cutlets that cook evenly

Although other foods—like fish fillets and veal cutlets, for example—can obviously be sautéed, chicken breasts and turkey cutlets, as well as boneless pork chops, all behave in a similar way in the sauté pan and therefore require learning only one technique. Plus, these cuts really need to be cooked properly or

Photos: Scott Phillips



they can be bland or tough. The good news about these popular cuts is their versatility—there's hardly a pan sauce that wouldn't taste great with any of them (see the chart on p. 43). I do, however, like to pay special attention to how the cutlets are trimmed and prepared before cooking.

Preparing chicken cutlets for sautéing depends on the style of chicken breast available. Some butchers remove the whole breast from the bone, leaving the two breast halves attached. Held together by cartilage, the breasts need to be separated. To split and trim them in one step, cut down on each side of the cartilage. If there's excess fat around the edges, trim that off too. Since the tenderloin thickens up the breast and keeps the center from cooking quickly, simply pull it out, remove the tendon, and cook it separately. Removing the tenderloin makes the breast an almost even thickness, guaranteeing fast, even cooking.

If they're available, trim-free boneless chicken breasts are perfect for weeknight cooking. Split, trimmed, and with tenderloins removed, these chicken breasts are practically skillet-ready right out of the package.

I like to make my own turkey cutlets, too. Turkey cutlets are usually available packaged in the meat case, but they're often sliced a little thin for my taste. For this reason—and because it's usually cheaper—I often buy a boneless, skinless turkey breast (sometime called turkey London broil) and make my own turkey cutlets. Since there are no bones, skin, or fat to remove, this butchering exercise is simple. (You can also buy a turkey breast on the bone; it's not difficult to remove it from the bone, and then you can peel off the skin.) To turn a boneless, skinless turkey breast into cutlets, remove the very large tenderloin from the underside of the breast (not the skin side). Depending on the

Golden-crusted outside, juicy inside. This perfectly cooked chicken breast gets extra flavor from a lemon-caper sauce.

tenderloin's size, it may be large enough to cut into two cutlets. If not, just leave it whole. Then cut the turkey breast crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices. Just like turkeys, turkey breasts vary tremendously in size. Depending on the size, there may be enough for one or two meals.

Since today's pork is so lean, I steer away from bone-in pork chops. I find that the bone sits on the pan surface when the lean, meaty part of the chop draws up and pulls away from the pan. Short of pan-frying—cooking the chop in a larger amount of fat—there's no way for a bone-in chop to brown in just a film of fat.

Also, as with any bone-in roast, chop, or steak, the meat nearest the bone is the last to get done. With beef or lamb, most people don't mind that the meat next to the bone is a little more rare. Pork is different, and most cooks end up overcooking the chop to get the bone meat done. If the meat is marbled, a little overcooking isn't a problem. But with today's lean pork, a big portion of the chop overcooks, losing juice and drying out, while you're waiting for the meat nearer the bone to get done.

So why not just buy packaged boneless pork chops? Like turkey cutlets, boneless pork chops—even the thick-cut style—may be too thin. In an attempt to create 4- or 5-ounce portions for today's health-conscious eaters, butchers cut the chops so thin that there's no way for them to brown well on the outside before they're cooked through and dried out.

If you can find 1- to 1¼-inch-thick boneless pork chops, buy them. If not, buy a small boneless loin roast from the rib end (the more flavorful section of the pork loin) and cut it into 1-inch-thick boneless chops. This technique doesn't require special butchering skills. With a moderately sharp knife,



A sauté pan does double-duty. Use it to cook turkey cutlets, and then scrape up the browned bits and make a sauce from orange juice, Dijon, and rosemary.

these five or six cuts should take less than a minute. Better to cook one thick chop and split it between two people than to cook two thin ones.

Heat your pan slowly; when a fleck of flour sizzles, you're ready

So that the pan is hot by the time the pork, chicken, or turkey is prepared, select a pan and set it over low heat, along with the fat, before you ever touch the meat. The cutlets or chops should fit in the pan comfortably with just a little space in between. For servings of four, sauté in a skillet that measures 12 inches across the top; for three, choose a 10-inch

Cut your own portions of meat to ensure even cooking



Pork

A rib-end pork loin has the most flavor. Cut boneless chops 1 inch thick so the meat won't dry out when cooked.



Turkey

Slice turkey cutlets from a boneless breast. One breast can yield eight to twelve cutlets (serve two per person).



Chicken

For even thickness, cut off the chicken breast's tenderloin. Remove the tendon and add the tenderloin to your sauté.

skillet; for two servings, an 8-inch skillet works well. Be sure that the skillet has a heavy base for even heat distribution.

Since neither oil nor butter is ideal, use a combination of the two—butter for flavor; oil to increase the smoking point. As soon as you turn on the burner, put the butter and oil in the pan. The slow, steady heat prevents the fat from wildly sizzling and spitting.

Should cutlets or chops be dredged in flour before sautéing? I think so. Compared with a floured version, the unprotected surface of uncoated meat—especially the chicken breasts—tends to turn leathery from high heat. I also like the almost fried look and flavor of coated cutlets and chops. Before dredging the cutlets or chops in flour, season both sides of each cut generously with salt and pepper. Don't measure the flour. Scoop a palmful of flour into a pie plate. When done with the dredging, toss the unused flour into the garbage.

When you're a couple of minutes away from sautéing, increase the heat to a strong medium high until the oil is hot but not smoking and the flecks of milk solids in the butter turn golden brown and smell nutty. Just to be sure, flick a little of the dredging flour into the pan. If the flour sizzles enthusiastically for a split second and immediately turns golden, the pan is ready. You want that perfect medium-high heat so that your cutlets will create some flavorful drippings (which will be the base for your quick pan sauce). Lay the cutlets in the pan and sauté for three minutes on the first side, three minutes on the second side. That's it. There's no need to pinch, prod, poke, and push them around. If the oil temperature and pan size are right, they should be golden brown on the outside and fully cooked but still juicy on the inside with one turn, in about six minutes.

Make a sauce and clean your pan at the same time

Occasionally, I'll serve these cuts with a wedge of lemon, a salsa, or an uncooked relish. But more often, I make a quick pan sauce once I remove them from the skillet. I hate wasting all those delicious pan drippings. And besides, making a sauce helps clean up the pan.

Many classic pan sauces require the reduction of fairly large quantities of wine, stock, juice, or cream, tacking on ten minutes or more to an otherwise quick dish. Unless the sautéed cuts are held in a warm oven, they're often soggy and cold by the time the sauce is done. In addition, many pan sauces are enriched and thickened with large quantities of butter or heavy cream. I don't mind the extra time or calories for a special meal, but for weeknights, I want a sauce that is flavorful, quick, and light.

How to sauté a cutlet

- ◆ Choose the right size skillet so that pieces of meat have neither too much nor too little space between them. For two cutlets, use an 8-inch pan; for three, a 10-inch pan; for four, a 12-inch pan.
- ◆ Measure the ingredients for your pan sauce (see the chart on p. 43) into a Pyrex cup and set aside.
- ◆ While preparing the chicken breasts, turkey cutlets, or boneless pork chops, set the skillet over medium-low heat and immediately add a mix of oil and butter (2 Tbs. butter and 1 Tbs. oil for four cutlets or chops) so that it heats up with the skillet.
- ◆ While the skillet is heating, prepare the poultry or pork, sprinkling both sides of each piece with salt and pepper and then dredging each side in flour.
- ◆ A couple of minutes before sautéing, increase the heat to medium high. When the oil is hot

but not smoking and the flecks of milk solids in the butter turn golden brown and smell nutty, add the meat.

◆ Cook the meat, turning only once, until golden brown on each side, about 6 minutes total (chicken breasts may need a minute more).

◆ Transfer the meat to a plate and make your pan sauce.



A generous coating of flour keeps a cutlet moist when sautéing and adds a little nutty "fried" flavor.



Pam Anderson likes a hot skillet for browning boneless pork chops. All those browned bits on the bottom of the pan make for a tasty sauce.

A classic pan sauce often starts with sautéing garlic or shallots in the empty skillet. My first step in speeding up the process is to eliminate that step. While there's hardly a pan sauce that wouldn't benefit from a little shallot or garlic, for time's sake I usually leave them out. In a few sauces where garlic is crucial, I simply add it along with the liquid and let it soften while the liquid is reducing.

My next step in making a quick pan sauce quicker is to decrease the initial quantity of liquid to be reduced. To transform chicken stock, juice, or wine from liquid to sauce, it must be reduced by at least half. Reducing 1½ or 2 cups of liquid—the quantity

called for in many recipes—takes more time and effort than I'm willing to give. After experimenting with quantities and reduction times, I've found that $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of liquid reduces to a nice consistency in just a few minutes. With flavor additions like capers or dried fruit and modest enrichments of butter or cream, there's an overflowing tablespoon of flavorful sauce for each person—more than enough for most occasions. After all, if your cutlets are cooked properly, they should be juicy, and the sauce is really just a flavor enhancer. If you find you want just a little more sauce, you can increase the amount of liquid to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup and still make a pretty quick reduction.



Ready, set, pour. Have your sauce ingredients combined in a Pyrex cup so you can pour them into the hot pan as soon as the meat comes out.



Scrape and stir. Nudge the browned bits as the liquids quickly reduce. Add butter or cream to enrich.

I find that mild liquids like low-salt chicken stock and orange juice and sweet fortified wines like Marsala, Madeira, vermouth, and port make fine sauces on their own. Reduce a straight $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of any of these liquids in a pan of drippings and you'll get a decent sauce. Acidic liquids, however, need taming. A sauce made from straight lemon juice or vinegar, for example, is too harsh. For these sauces, use a mix of six tablespoons of chicken stock, fortified wine, or juice for every two tablespoons lemon juice or vinegar (for a total of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of liquid). Balsamic vinegar is the one exception: because of its low acidity and natural sweetness, you can use up to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of it for the $\frac{1}{2}$ cup total.

Though not harsh, pan sauces made with straight red or white wine taste weak, sour, and off kilter. Cutting the wine with an equal amount of low-salt chicken stock balances the sauce. For wine sauces, use $\frac{1}{4}$ cup each chicken stock and wine (for a total of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup liquid). These wine-broth sauces—especially those made with red wine—also benefit from additional flavorings like Dijon mustard.

When using two different liquids in a pan sauce, some recipes call for reducing one of the liquids before adding the other. Not these sauces. While



Spoon and serve. In a matter of minutes, you can spoon port-cherry sauce onto your still-hot pork cutlet.

the chicken sautés, measure all the pan sauce liquids into a Pyrex measuring cup. When the chops or cutlets are done cooking and come out of the pan, you can pour the liquids into the skillet, where they simmer together.

How quickly the sauce reduces depends on the heat and heaviness of the pan. If the skillet is hot and heavy-duty, the liquid reduces almost as soon as it hits the pan. In a cooler skillet the reduction may take a couple of minutes. Once the sauce reduces to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup—don't measure, just eyeball it—it's time to add a little butter or cream.

While I want my sauce to be light, I find that a pan sauce without a little fat tastes brash and intense. Not only does a bit of butter or heavy cream enrich and soften flavors, it also thickens the sauce and gives it much-needed body. A small amount of sauce, however, requires only a small amount of butter. Just one miraculous tablespoon of butter (or two tablespoons of heavy cream) takes a sauce from puckery to pleasant.

Pam Anderson is the author of The Perfect Recipe (Houghton Mifflin) and How to Cook without a Book (Broadway Books). ♦

The measurements below are designed to be used for **four cutlets or chops**. If you sauté less, you'll have a bit more sauce per cutlet.

Use this chart to make a delicious pan sauce

To make a pan sauce, measure liquids and flavorings into a 1-cup Pyrex measuring cup before sautéing your cutlets or boneless chops. When your cutlets are done cooking, remove them and pour the contents of the measuring cup into the hot skillet; boil until the liquid reduces by half. Tilt the skillet so that the reduced liquid is at one side of the pan and whisk in the enrichment until the

sauce is smooth and glossy. Take the pan off the heat and spoon a portion of the sauce over each cutlet or chop and serve immediately. These pan sauces are designed to yield 1 to 1½ tablespoons per cutlet. If you decide you want a bit more, raise the total measurement of your liquid ingredients to ⅔ cup (from ½), and if you like a richer sauce, whisk in an extra tablespoon of butter.

SAUCE	LIQUID	FLAVORING	ENRICHMENT
<i>Red wine & Dijon pan sauce</i>	¼ cup low-salt chicken stock ¼ cup full-bodied red wine	1 tsp. Dijon mustard	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Curried chutney pan sauce</i>	6 Tbs. low-salt chicken stock 2 Tbs. rice-wine vinegar	2 Tbs. prepared chutney, such as Major Grey's ¼ tsp. curry powder	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Orange-Dijon pan sauce with rosemary</i>	½ cup orange juice	1 tsp. Dijon mustard ½ tsp. minced fresh rosemary optional: 1 Tbs. brown sugar	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Balsamic pan sauce</i>	¼ cup balsamic vinegar ¼ cup low-salt chicken stock	none	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Marsala wine pan sauce</i>	½ cup Marsala wine	none	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Port wine pan sauce with dried cherries (or cranberries)</i>	½ cup port wine	2 Tbs. dried cherries or dried cranberries 2 tsp. seedless raspberry jam or red currant jelly	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Lemon-caper pan sauce</i>	6 Tbs. low-salt chicken stock 2 Tbs. lemon juice	2 tsp. drained capers	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Sweet vermouth or cream sherry pan sauce with prunes</i>	6 Tbs. sweet vermouth or cream sherry 2 Tbs. cider vinegar	¼ cup chopped prunes	1 Tbs. butter
<i>Mustard cream pan sauce</i>	½ cup low-salt chicken stock	2 Tbs. coarse-grained mustard	2 Tbs. heavy cream
<i>Tomato-tarragon (or rosemary) pan sauce</i>	¼ cup low-salt chicken stock ¼ cup dry vermouth or white wine	1 tsp. minced fresh tarragon or scant ½ tsp. dried tarragon or 1 tsp. minced fresh rosemary 4 canned tomatoes, drained and seeded, coarsely chopped	1 Tbs. butter or 2 Tbs. heavy cream
<i>Simple pan sauce with green grapes</i>	½ cup low-salt chicken stock	1 cup green grapes, halved ½ tsp. minced fresh rosemary	2 Tbs. heavy cream

A Fresh Look at Spinach

Enjoy it creamed, sautéed, tossed into pasta, or as a fresh topping for pizza

BY ALAN TANGREN

During the depths of winter, spinach is an especially cheering dose of green, a comforting reminder that spring is just around the corner. And as well as being a great way to bring some green into your life in winter, the good news is that good spinach is increasingly available year-round.

The most versatile of cooking greens, spinach is great blanched and creamed, sautéed with brown butter, or wilted and tossed with pasta. Or don't cook it at all: the spinach salad opposite does double-duty as a fresh and tender pizza topping.

Flat-leafed or savoyed

Spinach grows best during the cool weather of spring and fall, when it's available everywhere. The winter

crops we see generally come from California, Texas, and Florida, while in the summer, production is limited to the coolest growing areas, like the foggy northern California coast.

At the market, look for fresh-looking, brightly colored leaves. Avoid wilted or yellowing leaves. Fresh spinach keeps well for two or three days sealed in a plastic bag in the fridge. Carefully inspect spinach sold in cellophane bags; don't buy any that's slimy, yellowed, or shriveled. And don't think that frozen spinach will be anything but a pale imitation of fresh.

Some spinach leaves are smooth and flat, while others are crinkled or "savoyed." Both kinds are delicious, and both can be young and tender, but you may find that the savoyed needs extra washing to

Spinach needs a quick trim and thorough washing



With one quick pass of the knife, bunched spinach is easy to trim.



Unless the leaves are very young, spinach should be stemmed. Be sure to remove the especially tough stems of savoyed spinach.



Give spinach a good dunk. Particularly gritty leaves may need a couple of changes of water to be thoroughly cleaned.



A salad and a pizza in one.
Fresh Spinach & Gruyère Pizza is a meal in itself, or a hearty appetizer.

get rid of the last traces of grit nestled in its crinkles. Because of its crinkles, however, the savoyed stuff has more body and tends to ship better.

You'll find fresh spinach sold either in bunches or in loose leaves. Loose leaves, easiest to find at green-markets or farmstands (and in bags at some super-markets), come either large or small. Use the large leaves for cooking; save the smaller ones for salads.

Mature spinach with thicker, less tender leaves is the best candidate for cooking, where its mineral quality can be tamed with cream, butter, or cheese. Blanching removes bitterness from older spinach, and it makes further cooking simpler and faster. A testament to its versatility, spinach works with sharp and tangy flavors, like mustard and lemon juice, as well as with creamy, eggy components. Some people report a dry, chalky sensation on the teeth and on the roof of the mouth when eating spinach. Agricultural scientists say that this comes from the leaves' high concentration of oxalic acid.

Because of the increasing availability of pre-washed leaf-picked spinach, with tender, edible stems, you can cut spinach preparation time to a bare minimum. But don't stint on washing. Spinach grows in sandy soil, and the tiniest bit of grit can ruin its delicious pleasure.

For every cup of cooked spinach, you'll need to buy about a pound of fresh.

RECIPES

Fresh Spinach & Gruyère Pizza

If you want to omit the bacon in this recipe, I'd suggest increasing the cheese just a bit. *Serves four as an appetizer.*

FOR THE DOUGH:

- 1 tsp. active dry yeast
- ¼ tsp. sugar
- ½ cup warm water (100° to 120°F)
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp. salt
- Olive oil for greasing the mixing bowl

FOR THE PIZZA:

- ¼ lb. sliced smoked bacon or pancetta (about five ¼-inch-thick slices), cut in ½-inch pieces
- Olive oil for brushing the dough
- ¼ cup thinly sliced scallions (white and light green parts)
- 4 oz. coarsely grated Gruyère cheese

FOR THE SALAD TOPPING:

- 2 tsp. red-wine vinegar
- ½ tsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 4 oz. loose baby spinach or ½ bunch tender young spinach, stemmed if needed, washed, and spun dry
- 1 hard-cooked egg, chopped

To make the dough—In a mixing bowl, dissolve the yeast and sugar in the water. Let rest until foamy, about 5 min. Add the flour and salt; mix until blended. Knead

Blanch spinach in water, or wilt it in a sauté pan



Spinach blanches in a flash. All it needs is a minute in boiling water.



Spinach leaves collapse quickly over high heat. Use tongs to turn the greens frequently so that they wilt evenly.

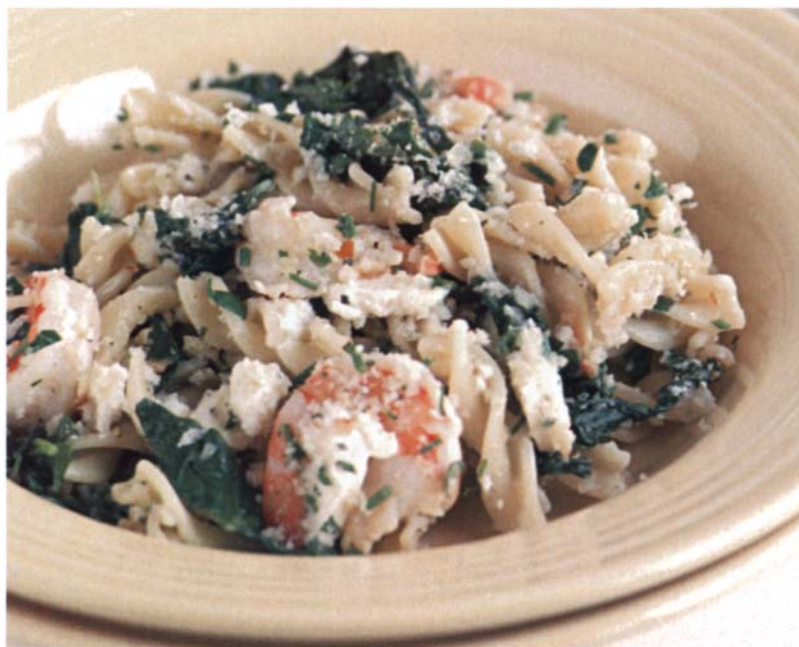
the dough on a very lightly floured surface for 10 min. or until smooth and elastic. Put it in a lightly oiled mixing bowl, cover loosely, and set in a warm place (70° to 80°F) until doubled in bulk, about 2 hours.

To make the pizza—Put a baking stone on the upper middle rack of the oven and heat the oven to 475°F. In a small skillet over medium heat, brown the bacon. Drain on paper towels and set aside. On a heavily floured surface, flatten the dough ball. Roll the dough into a 12-inch circle, lifting and stretching from underneath with the back of your hands. (If the dough resists, let it rest for a few minutes and then resume rolling.) The outside edges should be about ¼ inch thick, the center a bit thinner. Transfer the dough to a floured pizza paddle or the floured back of a baking sheet. Brush the dough with the olive oil and sprinkle

the scallions evenly to within ½ inch of the edge. Sprinkle on the cheese and the reserved bacon. Transfer the pizza onto the baking stone in the oven with a quick jerk of the paddle. Check the pizza after 2 or 3 min. and deflate any giant bubbles if need be.

To make the topping—While the pizza bakes, whisk together the vinegar, mustard, and olive oil; season with salt and pepper. When the edges of the crust are lightly browned and the cheese is bubbling, 10 to 12 min., return the pizza to the paddle or transfer it to a cutting board. Toss the spinach with the vinaigrette and pile it on the pizza. Sprinkle with the chopped egg, slice with a chef's knife, and serve immediately.

Wilted spinach rounds out a main-dish pasta with shrimp and feta cheese. A breadcrumb topping adds texture.



Spinach, Shrimp & Feta with Fusilli

For a little added richness, drizzle a bit of your favorite olive oil over the pasta just before serving. *Serves four as a main course.*

- ¾ lb. large shrimp (about 20), peeled and deveined**
- 1 large lemon, halved**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 8 oz. dried fusilli, gemelli, or other twist pasta**
- ¼ cup olive oil; more for drizzling**
- 1 large sprig fresh thyme**
- ¼ tsp. hot red pepper flakes**
- 4 cloves garlic, minced**
- ½ cup dry white wine**
- ⅔ cup clam juice**
- 2 large bunches spinach, stemmed, washed, and roughly chopped (about 10 oz. after stemming)**
- ¾ cup crumbled feta cheese**
- ½ cup coarse toasted breadcrumbs**
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh tarragon**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley**
- 2 Tbs. snipped fresh chives**

Put the cleaned shrimp in a small, nonreactive bowl. Squeeze the juice from one of the lemon halves onto the shrimp. Sprinkle with a little salt and pepper and let marinate for 20 min. Put a large pot of water on to

boil; when it's at a roiling boil, add the pasta and cook according to package directions. In a large skillet over medium heat, heat the olive oil. Add the thyme sprig and red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring, for about 1 min. to flavor the oil. Add the shrimp and minced garlic, stirring briskly and cooking just until the shrimp turn color, about 30 seconds. With a slotted spoon, transfer the shrimp to a plate and reserve. Raise the heat to high; add the white wine and clam juice. Boil until the liquid is reduced to ½ cup, 2 to 4 min. Remove the thyme sprig, stir in the spinach, and cover the skillet. Simmer until the spinach is just wilted, about 1 min., stirring once or twice. Add the boiled, drained pasta and the reserved shrimp to the skillet; stir to combine and let simmer over very low heat for 1 to 2 min. to finish the shrimp and let the flavors meld. Remove the pan from the heat and toss in the crumbled feta. Squeeze the juice from the remaining lemon half over the pasta; season with salt and pepper. Mix the breadcrumbs with the tarragon, parsley, and chives, sprinkle the mixture over the pasta without tossing, and serve.



Creamy Spinach is ready when the cream is reduced and the pan is still a bit saucy.

Creamy Spinach

This is lighter than traditional creamed spinach. You can turn it into a spinach gratin by pouring on a little additional cream, topping with a mixture of grated Parmesan and Gruyère, and baking until browned and the pan is bubbling. When squeezing the spinach, save the last tablespoons of green juice to flavor soup. *Yields 2 cups; serves four.*

3 bunches spinach (10 to 12 oz. each), trimmed and washed

2 Tbs. unsalted butter

¼ cup minced scallions or spring onions (white and light green parts)

¾ cup heavy cream

Scant ½ tsp. salt, or to taste

Freshly ground black pepper



Spinach Sauté with Brown Butter & Garlic serves as a colorful landing for simple seared fish or chicken.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, salting it well (about 1 Tbs.). Add the spinach to the boiling water and cover the pot to return it to a boil. Uncover and boil the spinach until it wilts completely, about 1 min. Drain in a colander and hold the colander under cold running water to cool the spinach. Squeeze the spinach with your hands to remove excess water. (Don't worry about losing vitamins; you're mostly squeezing out water.) Chop the spinach coarsely (you should have about 1 cup); set aside. In a large skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the scallions and cook for 2 min., stirring occasionally. Add the chopped spinach, the cream, and the salt. Raise the heat to medium high. Cook, breaking up the spinach with a wooden spoon, until the spinach is tender and has absorbed most but not all of the cream and the pan is still a bit saucy, 3 to 5 min. Remove from the heat, season with black pepper, adjust the seasonings as needed, and serve.

Spinach Sauté with Brown Butter & Garlic

This quick-cooking vegetable accompaniment is best with tender, young spinach. *Serves two.*

2 Tbs. unsalted butter

2 cloves garlic, gently crushed and peeled

1 large bunch spinach (10 to 12 oz.), thick stems trimmed; leaves washed and dried well

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 lemon, halved

In a large sauté pan over medium heat, melt the butter with the garlic until the butter is golden brown and smells nutty; make sure the garlic doesn't burn. Raise the heat to high and add the spinach, in batches if need be, flipping and stirring, until just barely wilted, about 1 min. Take the pan off the heat; remove the garlic. Season the spinach with salt, pepper, and a squeeze of lemon. Toss and serve immediately.

Alan Tangren is the former forager for Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California, where he now heads up the restaurant's pastry department. ♦

Garlic Bread Two Ways

To vary this delicious classic, crisp a whole loaf in a paper bag or toast slices under the broiler

BY STEVE HUNTER

Bread is my favorite food and garlic isn't far behind it—marry them into garlic bread and it's my idea of nirvana. The essential link between garlic and bread is garlic butter. I used to make it with a heavy hand, pounding raw garlic to a paste in a mortar and pestle. The result was powerfully delicious but also overpowering to everything else on the menu. I've made a lot of garlic bread since then and have found that if I simply sauté the garlic first, I can get the fresh garlic flavor and aroma I crave—and still taste the rest of the meal.

I always make the same garlic butter, but by deciding whether to reheat a whole loaf of bread or broil slices, and by choosing a thin-crust Italian loaf or a thick-crust peasant bread, I can get two distinctly different results.

Make a potent—not pungent—garlic butter

Garlic butter should be filled with fresh garlic flavor, not big chunks of garlic. I can avoid these chunks by mincing the garlic *very* finely with a chef's knife (this works best if I add the salt to the garlic as I mince) or better yet, I'll make the garlic into a paste with a garlic press, a Microplane grater, or a mortar and pestle.

I also sauté the garlic in a little olive oil to soften its flavor. This only takes a minute or two, and I watch it closely to make sure the garlic doesn't start to brown and turn bitter. After sautéing, I pour the garlic and hot oil over cold diced butter; there's just enough heat to soften the butter to a spreadable consistency when I mash it together.

Another way to moderate the pungency of the garlic is to introduce other flavors. The sauté is a good time to add spices (I almost always include



For a crisp crust and moist interior, heat a whole loaf of garlic bread in a paper bag.



Method 1: Reheat a loaf in a wet paper bag

Heat the oven to 400°F. Make diagonal slices in a 1-pound loaf of bread at $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch intervals, stopping short of the bottom crust. Slather some of the garlic butter into each cut.

Slip the loaf back into the paper bag it came in (or use a torn paper grocery bag; avoid those with printing or plastic on them). Wet the entire bag with a spray bottle (see the

photo at left) or a very fast pass under the faucet.

Pop the package into the oven until it smells of popcorn and the crust is crisp, 10 to 15 minutes.

black pepper) or dried herbs so that their flavors can meld with the garlic as it cooks. Other additions, like fresh parsley, are better left uncooked; you should wait to mix them into the butter at the end.

Choose a bread and a cooking method

I like to treat different kinds of bread with different cooking methods: I reheat a loaf of thin-crust

Method 2: Toast slices in the broiler

Heat the broiler. Cut $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch slices on the diagonal off a 1-pound loaf of bread and spread the garlic butter all the way to the edges on one side of each slice (see the photo at right) to keep the edges

from burning. Arrange the slices on a baking sheet and broil until dark around the edges, 2 to 4 minutes.

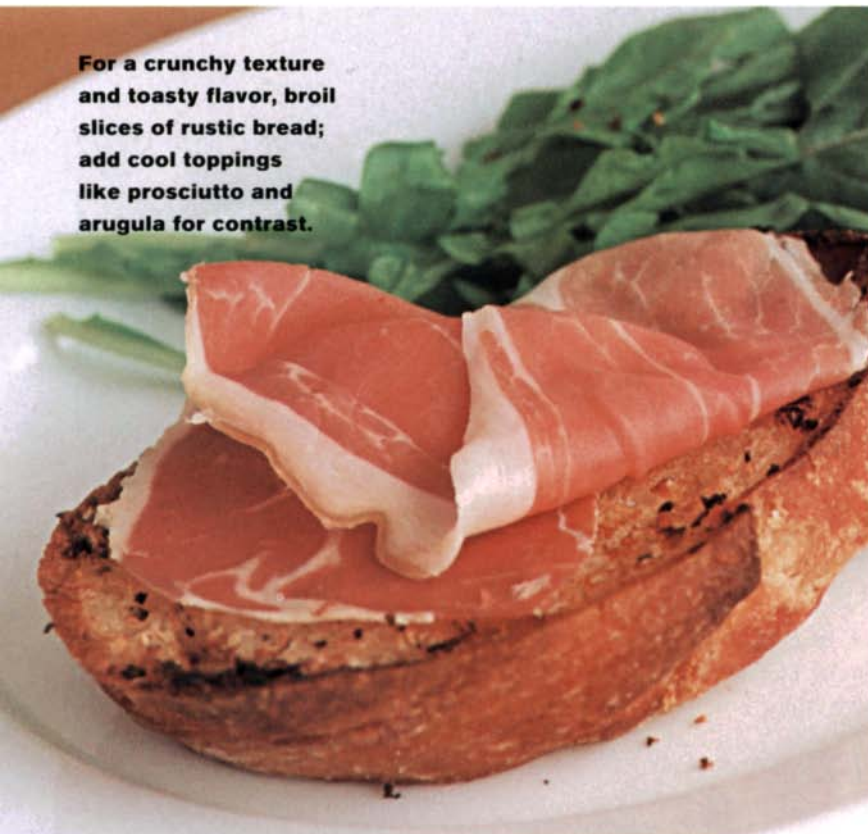
Add toppings like cheese or pesto about halfway through broiling, when the bread

just begins to brown and the butter starts to bubble. This way, the bread gets a little crisper and the topping won't burn.

Toss on toppings like tomatoes or arugula right before serving.



For a crunchy texture and toasty flavor, broil slices of rustic bread; add cool toppings like prosciutto and arugula for contrast.



grocery store Italian bread in the oven, and I broil slices of thick-crust peasant bread bruschetta style. I prefer these combinations, but they're not cast in stone. Both breads produce excellent results with either technique when the mood or the menu demand it.

The wet paper bag method (far left) is a great way to reheat any loaf of bread, and a perfect way to make classic garlic bread. The evaporating water gives the loaf a burst of steam, which refreshes the interior (this type of bread tends toward the dry side). Then the bag dries out to let the crust crisp and brown.

Slices of thick-crust peasant bread are great for broiling (above left) because they have an open texture that catches the garlic butter and any extra toppings you add (see the box below). Just remember that toasting in the broiler demands your undivided attention, lest you end up with, well, toast.

RECIPE

Sautéed Garlic Butter

You can adjust the amount of garlic to suit your tolerance: 1 clove for mild or up to 4 for high potency. Yields enough for one 16- to 18-oz. loaf of bread.

- 2 Tbs. fruity olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, finely minced or puréed (about 3 tsp.)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. coarse salt
- 1 tsp. coarsely ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. cold unsalted butter, in small dice or thin slices

In a small skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the garlic, salt, and pepper and cook, sizzling gently for about 2 min., stirring occasionally. The garlic should soften and become fragrant but not brown. Put the butter in a small bowl and pour the oil and garlic over it. Blend until smooth enough to spread evenly.

Steve Hunter is the art director for Fine Cooking. ♦

Garlic butter additions

Add to the sauté

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. dried herbs such as thyme or oregano
3 small anchovy fillets (cut the salt to $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp.)
a pinch of saffron

Add to the butter

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme, oregano, chives, or basil (or $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. dried)

Toppings for slices

Top and broil

Parmesan, provolone, or mozzarella
a dab of tapenade or pesto

Top and serve

thinly sliced prosciutto
seeded and chopped tomatoes
arugula or watercress

Get Great Flavor from

Shape ground meat and poultry into simple, succulent main dishes with loads of flavor and tender texture

BY SHIRLEY SARVIS



Half-and-half adds moisture and richness to the ground meat mixture, and it helps the seasonings blend in.



For a tender result, mix the meat gently and don't overwork it. Be vigilant about washing your hands first.



Use a gentle hand, too, when shaping the mixture. Light patting (not dense packing) ensures a light, juicy result.

Meatloaf and hamburgers, two supremely tasty home dishes, convinced me to further explore ground meat's potential. The light, loose texture of ground meat eagerly accepts mix-ins, and its multiple surfaces are terrific at absorbing and delivering flavor—two reasons why it's such a great medium for shaping into patties, "cushions," and meatballs that become easy and delicious weeknight dinners.

The most common complaints I hear about ground meat dishes is that they can be heavy, dense, dry, and boring. But as long as you mix with a light hand and use a moist filler and generous seasonings, you'll get tender, savory results, whether with ground beef, lamb, veal, chicken, or turkey.

Full flavor, tender texture

Patties, meatballs, and cushions taste great because they stay good and juicy, and if you cook the patties at the specified heat and times, you retain the juices and the meat won't dry out. When it's time to eat, all those

cut surfaces release their juices easily. Follow the cooking times in the recipes, and after a while, you'll be able to feel for doneness: press a fingertip on the ground meat; it should have a slight spring to it, which means that it's cooked through but still juicy.

Grinding meat gives it a lush consistency by breaking down tough fibers and connective tissue. Generally, the cuts used for grinding (like shoulder), though tasty, are less tender to begin with. But because their long muscle fibers are cut fine in grinding, the cooked result isn't only savory, it's tender, too.

If you're lucky enough to have a good butcher who will grind meat fresh for you, as I do, that's really the best. At the butcher's, specify "once ground" in order to get a grind that's not too fine. You'll get the most succulent results that way. If you do buy packaged ground meat, check the label and choose meat that has been ground as recently as possible, preferably that day. Use it as soon as you can, because ground meat spoils faster than solid cuts. I shave off the outer

Ground Meat



Don't crowd the pan—instead, use two skillets. Leaving space in the pan means that the meat will brown rather than steam.

surfaces with a very sharp knife on a pristine cutting board to make absolutely certain of cleanliness.

For filler and flavor, add chopped herbs and soaked breadcrumbs

Minced garlic, fresh herbs, and dried spices flavor ground meat so effectively because they get mixed right into the center of the meat, unlike with a steak or roast, where the seasoning just sits on the surface. I use fresh and dried herbs, depending on the flavor I'm looking for.

Another important method for keeping the texture light and tender is using a binder, which prevents the meat from fusing together too tightly. Breadcrumbs soaked in half-and-half are an excellent binder, filling out the mixture so that it's substantial but not dense. Grated cheese and sautéed onions also help keep things loose and add depth, too.

Of course, a sauce or condiment served with the meat is another opportunity for flavor. I've included a



A mix of beef and pork sausage lends flavor to moist “cushions.”
Let a bed of noodles soak up the juices.



Don't skimp on the oil, or the heat. As with all of these dishes, Lemony Chicken Meatballs brown best when there's enough fat in the pan and the heat is high enough.

chopped olive sauce with the Lemony Chicken Meatballs to add even more interest and moistness.

Mixing in seasonings ahead of cooking time lets the meat soak up the flavors. Cover the shaped meatballs and refrigerate for 15 minutes, and then let them sit at room temperature for another 15 minutes before cooking so they'll brown well and cook evenly.

Be patient and resist fiddling

For the brownest, juiciest results, a few last words:

- ♦ **Try not to shuttle the meat around the pan.** Let the patties stay in one place so they can brown properly. Just check that they're not sticking to the pan.
- ♦ **Resist pressing on the meat with the spatula.** Pressing down pushes out juices, again yielding a dense, dry result. When feeling for doneness, give the meat a quick, gentle poke: it should feel springy-firm.

Lemony Chicken Meatballs with Cumin & Parsley

These slightly spicy meatballs, paired with a tangy olive sauce, are great served on couscous. *Serves four.*

FOR THE MEATBALLS:

- 1/3 cup soft, coarse fresh breadcrumbs (don't use crusts)
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- 1 lb. freshly ground lean chicken (light and dark meat) or ground turkey breast
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 1/2 tsp. ground cumin
- 1/8 tsp. dried red pepper flakes, or to taste
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 2/3 cup minced onion, sautéed in 2 Tbs. olive oil until translucent; half reserved for the topping
- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 2 Tbs. butter

FOR THE TOPPING:

- 2 Tbs. butter
- 1 tsp. paprika
- 1/4 tsp. ground cumin
- 1/2 cup minced, well-drained pitted green olives
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

To make the meatballs—In a large bowl, soak the breadcrumbs in the lemon juice until plumped and the liquid is absorbed, about 5 min. Add the ground chicken or turkey, salt, paprika, cumin, pepper flakes, parsley, and half of the sautéed onions, along with the oil in the pan. Mix gently but thoroughly. Shape into 1½-inch meatballs; you should end up with 20. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil and butter over medium-high heat. When the butter has melted, add the meatballs (take care not to crowd the pan) and cook,

Grinding meat in a food processor

Most ground meat is easy to find at the supermarket, and if your butcher will grind it fresh, all the better. If you want to try grinding your own meat at home, here are the cuts to ask for and how to grind it. Make sure you've blotted the meat thoroughly dry before grinding. Also, avoid overgrinding or the meat will be mushy.

Which cuts to use

When requesting ground meat at the butcher or grinding your own, here are the cuts to look for:

Beef: chuck

Chicken: skinless light and dark meat

Lamb: lean shoulder

Turkey: skinless breast

Veal: lean shoulder



Cut the meat into 1-inch cubes and put it in a food processor fitted with the metal blade.



Pulse until the meat is coarsely textured and ground in about 1/8-inch pieces. Pulsing's on-off action lets you easily see, feel, and control the grind.

turning gently, until browned on 2 or 3 sides and cooked through, about 5 min. total. Transfer to warm serving plates.

To make the topping—In a small skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the remaining sautéed onions, the paprika, and the cumin; cook over medium heat until warmed through. Stir in the olives and lemon juice; cook, stirring, until just heated through. Spoon the topping over the meatballs.

Lamb Patties with Chopped Herbs

Good accompaniments would be rice pilaf and some cucumber-yogurt salad. *Serves four.*

1 lb. freshly ground lean lamb
¾ tsp. salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 large cloves garlic, minced
½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
3 Tbs. chopped fresh mint
Generous ½ tsp. minced fresh rosemary
Oil for the pan

In a mixing bowl, lightly and thoroughly mix the ground lamb, salt, pepper, garlic, parsley, mint, and rosemary. Shape into four patties, each 1¼ inches thick. Add just enough oil to a large skillet to make a thin film; heat over medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the



Chopped mint and parsley are the simple flavorings for succulent lamb patties.

patties (take care not to crowd the pan) and brown well on both sides, turning occasionally, until browned, cooked through, and springy-firm, 12 to 15 min. total.

Beef & Sausage Cushions

If your grocery store doesn't stock good, mildly spiced bulk pork sausage, buy small link sausages, peel off the casing, and crumble them. *Serves four.*

½ cup soft, coarse fresh breadcrumbs (don't use crusts)
⅓ cup half-and-half
½ lb. freshly ground beef
½ lb. fresh bulk pork sausage or link sausage, lightly crumbled
3 Tbs. freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano*
1 clove garlic, minced
¾ cup finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1½ tsp. crumbled dried basil

¾ tsp. crumbled dried sage
¼ tsp. minced fresh rosemary
1 tsp. salt
⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbs. olive oil
1 Tbs. butter

In a large bowl, soak the breadcrumbs in the half-and-half until plumped and the liquid is absorbed, about 5 min. Add the ground beef, sausage, cheese, garlic, parsley, basil, sage, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Mix gently and thoroughly. Shape the mixture into eight patties, each 1¼ inches thick. Over medium heat, heat the oil and butter in a large skillet (or two smaller ones). Add the patties, setting them well apart, and brown on both sides, turning occasionally, until browned, cooked through, and springy-firm, 10 to 12 min. total.

Veal Patties with Toasted Hazelnuts

I like the textural contrast that the toasted hazelnuts and a bed of butter lettuce provide. *Serves four.*

FOR THE HAZELNUT TOPPING:

1½ Tbs. unsalted butter
¾ cup lightly toasted chopped hazelnuts
¼ tsp. salt

FOR THE PATTIES:

½ cup soft, coarse fresh breadcrumbs (don't use crusts)
⅓ cup half-and-half
1 lb. freshly ground veal
Scant ¾ tsp. salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
¾ tsp. ground nutmeg
½ tsp. ground coriander
Scant ¼ tsp. sugar
Scant ½ cup very finely minced onion
2 Tbs. butter; more as needed
Tender leaves of butter lettuce, crisp center veins removed

To make the topping—Melt the butter in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the hazelnuts and the salt. Cook, stirring, just until heated through. Keep warm.

To make the patties—In a large bowl, soak the breadcrumbs in the half-and-half until plumped and the liquid is absorbed, about 5 min. Add the ground veal, salt, pepper, nutmeg, coriander, sugar, and onions. Mix gently but thoroughly. Shape into four patties, each 1¼ inches thick. In a large, heavy skillet, heat the butter over medium-high heat until it bubbles. Add the patties (take care not to crowd the pan) and cook, turning occasionally and adding more butter to the pan as needed, until browned, cooked through, and springy-firm, about 16 min. total. Arrange the lettuce leaves as a single-layer liner on each serving plate; set a patty on top. Spoon a little topping over each patty and serve.



Chopped hazelnuts lend a nice crunch to Veal & Hazelnut Patties.

Shirley Sarvis is a food and wine writer and consultant based in San Francisco. ♦

The Only Peanut Butter

Peanut butter and a good cookie are two of my favorite things, so for me, combining them is a natural. The trouble is, the traditional round peanut butter cookie with the crossed-fork imprint never really thrilled me. So I decided it was high time to develop my own version. I knew I wanted more, and I wanted it in a sandwich cookie: crunchy-crumbly peanut butter wafers surrounding a creamy filling flecked with roasted peanuts and chopped chocolate.

Use smooth peanut butter (yes, from a jar)

The reason this peanut butter cookie is head and shoulders above the others is that it's a hefty sandwich cookie with great peanut flavor in both the filling and the cookie.

For the best texture in both components, I recommend smooth peanut butter, for a couple of reasons. The chunks in chunky-style don't give as tender-crumbly a texture in the finished cookie. Also, I like to make my own chunky filling by stirring in roasted chopped peanuts—the peanut bits in chunky peanut butter don't hold a candle to chopping your own.

I'm usually a stickler for artisan ingredients, but with the peanut butter for these cookies, I make an exception and use a jarred peanut butter like Skippy, which makes delicious cookies. I've tried freshly ground peanut butter from the health-food store—although it's terrific on sandwiches, it turns out a gloppy cookie filling.

The crowning touch for these cookies is the chopped chocolate in the filling (a shameless tribute to Reese's cups). My recipe calls for dark chocolate, because that's what I like, but if you prefer milk chocolate, use that instead.

If you feel like assembling these cookies ahead, they won't get soggy—even filled—and they'll keep in the refrigerator or at room temperature for a couple

For a double hit of flavor, sandwich a chocolate-flecked peanut cream between crunchy-light cookies

BY LINDA WEBER



When it's time to add the flour, stop the mixer. Stir it in by hand to avoid overmixing the dough.

of days. That's as long as I can vouch for, though—these peanut butter cookies never hang around my kitchen any longer than that.

RECIPE

Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies

This recipe can be mixed by hand or in an electric mixer. Use smooth peanut butter rather than chunky. I get good results with Skippy. *Yields eighteen 2½-inch sandwiches.*

FOR THE COOKIES:

6 oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
2 oz. (¾ cup) cake flour
½ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. salt
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature
¾ cup smooth peanut butter
½ cup sugar
½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 large egg

FOR THE FILLING:

1½ cups confectioners' sugar
3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
¾ cup smooth peanut butter
3 Tbs. heavy cream
¼ cup coarsely chopped roasted unsalted peanuts
¼ cup coarsely chopped semisweet chocolate, or mini semisweet chocolate chips

To make the cookies—Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment. In a medium bowl, sift together the



Instead of cross-hatching with a fork, use your fingers to press and decorate.

Cookie You'll Ever Want

two flours, baking soda, and salt. In the bowl of an electric mixer, cream the butter, peanut butter, and sugars with the paddle attachment until light and fluffy. Add the vanilla and egg; continue creaming until smooth and fluffy, about 3 min. with an electric mixer (longer by hand). Stir in the flour mixture by hand just until it's incorporated; don't overmix or the cookies will be tough. Drop heaping tablespoonfuls of batter, spaced about 2 inches apart, onto the lined baking sheets. With floured fingers, flatten each dab of batter into a 2-inch round. Bake until the cookies are puffed and golden, 12 to 14 min., rotating the baking sheets if needed for even baking. Transfer the cookies to a rack to cool.

While the cookies cool, make the filling—In a small bowl, cream the confectioners' sugar, butter, and peanut butter until smooth. Add the heavy cream; continue creaming until smooth and fluffy. Stir in the chopped peanuts and chocolate.

To assemble—Transfer the cooled cookies to a work surface, flipping half of them over. With an offset spatula or a butter knife, spread a scant teaspoon of filling onto each turned-over cookie. Set another wafer on top of each filled cookie, pressing gently to spread the filling. Store sealed at room temperature or in the refrigerator.

Linda Weber bakes cookies—as well as tarts, breads, and cakes—at Della Fattoria, the Weber family artisan bakery in Petaluma, California. ♦



For a textured filling, stir in peanuts and chocolate, “a tribute,” says Linda Weber, “to Reese’s cups.”



An offset spatula is handy for spreading the cookie filling easily and evenly. A blunt table knife works, too.

It's all about texture. These sandwich cookies have a crumbly-crunchy wafer matched with a creamy-chunky filling.

Seeking Greatness in a Grater

A ball-topped tower grater and a razor-sharp rasp could provide all the flakes, shreds, and shards you'll ever need

BY ROBERT WEMISCHNER

A tower of tower graters.

Progressive's Pro Grip Ultra tops the heap with its unique handle and its sure-footed feel.

Oxo's two-sided grater (middle) can stand as a tower or hook securely over a bowl.

The best thing about Cuisipro's six-sided grater is its removable base, which lets you keep the grated food within the grater until you're ready to dump it into a bowl or pan.

Whether you're grating a bit of Parmesan as the final fillip on a plate of perfectly cooked pasta or a blizzard of Cheddar to hold together a casserole, the tool you use makes a tremendous difference in the effort expended and the quality of the finished product.

My ideal grater would have the following attributes: it would grate evenly and relatively effortlessly across its entire perforated surface; it wouldn't pose a danger to my knuckles; it would be easy to clean; and it would work well for all kinds of foods, from cheeses and chocolate to whole nutmeg and cinnamon, to garlic and fresh ginger. If you find one that does all that, let me know. Systematically testing a battery of graters, I came to the conclusion that no single tool is capable of grating all kinds of foods well. That said, I looked for those that matched my other criteria best.

For a workhorse, choose a tower grater

For grating large amounts of cheese in the kitchen—or if I need to grate potatoes or carrots—I turn to a tower grater. (Occasionally, I'll use the grater disk on my food processor, but only if I'm grating a copious amount; otherwise, the cleanup isn't worth it.)

Sometimes called a box grater, a tower grater is traditionally a slightly tapered pyramid, though some now come with five and six sides, and my favorite has only three. Each side has a different size grating surface. It usually has an open bottom and a handle on top, though some new designs feature removable bases, allowing you to collect the cheese inside the grater tower and then move it to your bowl, where you can dump it out in one fell swoop. Though I find tower graters too bulky to use at the table, I like the fact that they let me run a large hunk of cheese up and down the sides. A good tower grater should feel solidly constructed, with rigid sides and a base that won't easily slide out from under you. If it feels uncomfortable or unwieldy, you won't want to use it even if it has the best grating surface.

A grater with a comfy, innovative handle beats out traditionally shaped tower graters. Although new doesn't always mean improved, I really like the fresh approach Progressive Inter-



Washboard-style graters continue to hang in there with innovative improvements.

The Microplane rasp (left) has extremely sharp teeth that are perfect for very fine grating and can also grate ginger.

The holes on Kuhn Rikon's handsome version (center) yield different results depending on which side you use.

Leifheit's more traditional model (right) also offers multiple grating options, including a slicer, which works if you remember to turn the grater over to use it.



national has taken with one of its tower graters. Called the Pro Grip Ultra, it's a tripod style with small, medium, and large holes (see the photo at left). What's really nifty about it is its rubber-ball handle, which feels much better in your hand than the traditional bar-style handle. It also boasts no-skid rubber pads on the corners of its base. Although seemingly less sharp to the touch than others, this one grates chocolate and hard cheese well. Just don't try to grate fresh garlic or ginger, even on its finest side, since these moist foods tend to get stuck on the grater's perforations. Another potential drawback may be that without a handle for hanging, it's a little bulky to store. If you like a handle, Progressive also makes a more traditionally styled tower grater, as does Cuisipro, whose six-sided version is shown at left.

Oxo Good Grips, which spearheaded the movement toward ergonomic, rubber-handled kitchen tools, makes a two-sided grater that can stand on its rubber base like a tower grater or be fastened securely over a bowl—a nice touch.

Washboard styles clean easily and store well

If a box grater is simply too bulky for you, you may prefer a classic, hand-held grater, what I call the washboard style. When choosing a washboard grater,

look for one with a comfortable handle and ample surface area. The teeth should be sharp, but not so obvious that the grater will pose a danger in a kitchen drawer. In fact, many of the graters I like best don't feel very sharp to the touch yet grate better than those with angry-looking perforations.

The washboard-style grater by Leifheit (see the photo above) has rubber-capped feet to keep it in place while grating with it on a flat surface. Not dangerously sharp, this grater has two perforated surfaces, one coarse and one medium fine, and a slicer blade placed at an angle between the other two surfaces. The blade, when used properly from the reverse side of the grater, comes in handy, not only for slicing cucumbers, but also when you want to produce long shards or flakes of cheese or chocolate.

Kuhn Rikon's novel take on the washboard-style grater (see the photo above) looks stylish even at the dinner table and feels great in the hand. Eleven inches from the top of its handle to the base of its rectangular grating surface, this one has the benefit of two-sided use. One side is composed of plain circles that produce delicate flakes of grated cheese. Four faint notches around each perforation on the other side produce smaller bits of cheese. Although designed to serve the dual purpose of cheese and



Rotary graters direct the cheese or chocolate as it falls—a distinct benefit at the table.

The metal Cuisipro grater on the left can be assembled for a righty or a lefty.

Zyliss offers an additional grating drum at an extra cost.

chocolate grater, I found this one less useful when I wanted long shards of chocolate to decorate a mousse, cake, or latte. But thanks to its simple flat design, it aced the ease-of-cleaning test, doesn't pose a threat to skin or nails, and, as a bonus, stores easily.

The rasp: a category unto itself

Because it's hand-held and a single plane, rasp-style graters (see the photo on p. 57), which burst onto the cooking scene a few years ago, can be classified in the washboard category. But the razor-sharp yet safe-feeling surface of the rasp is so unique that this grater stands on its own. I absolutely love this tool, which you'll most often see marketed as the Microplane, for grating citrus zest. It also works well for fresh ginger and garlic, a task at which most graters fail. I do use it for chocolate and hard cheese, but only when I want a very finely textured result.

Rotary graters are not just for restaurants

Rotary graters (see the photo above) are good hand-held options and are great at the table. The cheese or chocolate goes into a hopper, and a handle presses the food down against a perforated drum, which is turned by a crank (I'm talking about a mechanical device here, not the person doing the grating). Composed of a few pieces, a good rotary grater should assemble easily and intuitively and feel comfortable in your hand. Some models even allow assembly for righties or lefties. Ideally, a rotary grater would come with more than one cylinder to grate different sizes.

Rotary graters can grate only small amounts at a time, and they don't generally grate items other than cheese or chocolate. You also should be prepared to exert some pressure on the handle to keep the food well seated against the grating surface. But rotary graters are attractive and comfortable, making them great for using at the table. Best of all, the cylinder

directs where the cheese falls—on your plate and not on the placemat.

Zyliss's plastic rotary grater is comfortable and easy to assemble. But if you want to have the flexibility of several sizes of grated flakes, you'll need to shell out a few extra bucks for an auxiliary cylinder with a coarse grating surface, which is also better suited to softer cheese. Don't even try a softer cheese with the standard cylinder. (Truth be told, softer cheeses tend to gum up most styles of grater; try freezing these kinds of cheese for about 30 minutes before grating to maximize the grater's efficiency, and use a large hole.)

Rotary graters also come in stainless-steel models, including the Moulinex Mouli and the Cuisipro rotary grater. The stiffer material can give you more leverage against the cheese compared to the slightly more flexible plastic of the Zyliss.

Skip true box graters altogether

Not to be confused with a tower grater, these are actual boxes, often made of wood, sometimes plastic, topped by a stainless-steel washboard-style grater. Some models are quite attractive and may lure you into thinking you need one on your counter. But there are a few things I don't like about these: The box just gives you something else to clean, and its storage application is beside the point for most things you want to grate, cheese and potatoes, for example, which should be used soon after grating for best results.

What to do? Buy two

As I mentioned earlier, I haven't found the single perfect grater. If I could choose only one from among those I tested, I'd go with the Pro Grip Ultra. But since buying a grater won't break the bank—most cost between \$7 and

\$20—and won't use up too much storage space, you might consider buying two. Choose depending on your grating goals: a Microplane for its light, fluffy results and its superior zesting ability, perhaps, or a rotary grater for use at the table.

By the way, the brands and styles I've recommended are among those most readily available from kitchen stores and web sites. But my testing did not include every grater out there; if I've missed your favorite, write or e-mail the magazine to let others know about it and include a few words about why you like it.

A grater that's comfortable is the one you'll want to use.

Robert Wemischner is the author of The Vivid Flavors Cookbook; his newest book is Cooking with Tea, which he co-wrote with Diana Rosen. ♦

Old-Fashioned cakes with a Subtle Twist

Olive oil in the batter is the secret to a moist, tender cake with lots of character

BY LESLIE REVSIN

I'm an avowed cake freak. My shameless ardor is most often triggered by old-fashioned American layer cakes, the kind with moist, tender layers bundled up in a creamy icing, the kind my mom *would* have made, if only she knew how to bake—and if she knew about the glories of using olive oil in the batter.

Actually, I'm a fairly recent convert to the idea of olive oil cakes. After doing a bit of travelling through Spain, Portugal, and Greece, where olive oil reigns supreme—even in desserts—I returned home eager to see what goodies I might concoct with this golden liquid. After a few days in the kitchen, I came up with a troupe of unusual and terrific cakes that I find myself making again and again.

Curiosity compelled me to try these same cakes using a generic vegetable oil instead of olive oil. The results surprised me. The olive oil versions were moister and had a more tender, refined crumb (I've since learned that olive oil contains natural emulsifiers, which improve moisture and texture), but even more striking was their richer, deeper character. The olive oil seemed to act like an invisible helper, somehow coaxing superior savor and clarity from the ingredients, weaving them together to create a richer, more alive whole.

A mild, less costly olive oil is best

You must be thinking, don't these cakes taste like olive oil?

No, they don't—nor would I want them to. Rather than use a high-end extra-virgin oil, I use the grade that's simply called "olive oil" (this grade used to be called "pure" or "100-percent pure," and some producers still label it that way). I prefer this oil for baking because it's milder and cheaper than



Plum & Blueberry
Upside-Down Cake



Leslie Revsin calls olive oil “an invisible helper” in cakes, making them extra moist with a tender, refined crumb.

extra-virgin oil and because the flavor nuances that make the best extra-virgin olive oils so special would vanish in the heat of an oven anyway.

On the other hand, if you use extra-virgin olive oil as your everyday cooking oil, you can go ahead and use it in these cakes, too. I’ve used extra-virgin oil when it was the only kind available—for a last-minute birthday cake made at my in-laws’ house—and there was no olivy taste to the cake, although I could easily detect it in the sticky residue left in the pan. And just so you know, there were enough kids scarfing up the cake at this party that I’ve no doubt that one of them would have yelled, “Hey, this tastes funny...”

Oil makes a tender cake that retains its moistness

All three of these cakes have a lot going on flavor-wise. The Carrot Cake with Orange Cream Cheese Frosting and the Dark Chocolate Cake are the two powerhouses, especially the chocolate cake, which is one delicious, meaty layer of super-chocolate cakehood. The most delicate of the bunch is the Plum & Blueberry Upside-Down Cake. It’s made with cake flour instead of all-purpose flour, which makes the cake magnificently tender.



A heavy-duty cocoa paste makes an intensely chocolate cake. Pour it into the egg mixture while it’s warm, not hot, so it doesn’t curdle the eggs.

Olive oil doesn’t help with leavening, but it does supply moistness. In cakes using butter and shortening, the fat is usually creamed with sugar to aerate the batter. But oil doesn’t hold air bubbles the way a solid fat will, so olive oil cakes get almost all their leavening from other sources, such as a chemical leaven like baking soda, or whipped egg whites (although when eggs and olive oil are whipped together in the chocolate cake, the combination does incorporate some air). Where oil outperforms butter is in its ability to coat flour proteins, which reduces gluten formation and keeps the crumb extra tender. The greased proteins can’t grab water to make gluten, and this means more unbound water is left in the cake, making it quite moist.

I’ve seen some recipes for oil-based cakes that call for blending everything together in a single bowl all at once. My cakes are simple to make, but I’m afraid they aren’t *that* simple. Here are a few points to keep in mind when making each one.

To make the chocolate cake, you whip eggs with olive oil and sugar, mix in a chocolate paste made from cocoa powder and boiling water, and stir in flour. There are two keys to making this cake just right. First, whip the egg mixture until it’s thick and lemon colored—the incorporated air from this process adds leavening power (the only other leavener is a smidgen of baking soda). Second, be sure the chocolate paste is warm but not hot so it mixes in easily and smoothly but doesn’t cook the eggs.

To make the carrot cake, you slowly stir the olive oil and sugar for several minutes to blend them well before adding half of the dry ingredients. Then you stir in the remaining dry ingredients alternating with the eggs, finally stirring in the carrots and pecans. Again, two keys to success: First, the carrots and nuts should be very finely chopped so they become a fully integrated part of the crumb. Second, the batter should sit for 15 minutes before it's poured into the pan. This resting period lets the carrots flavor the batter and thin it somewhat as they continue to give off moisture. It also lets the gluten in the flour relax for a more tender result.

To make the plum and blueberry upside-down cake, you whisk olive oil, buttermilk, and egg yolks together lightly and stir them into the dry ingredients, finishing by folding in a stiff egg-white meringue for rising power and an airy texture. How you incorporate the meringue is the key; it's best done in two stages for a smooth, well-amalgamated batter. You'll pour half of the cake batter on top of the meringue and gently mix them by hand with a thin-wire whisk (I use the whisk attachment from my electric mixer, the same one I used to make the meringue) so they become a solid color with no white lumps or streaks. Then you'll repeat this process with the rest of the batter. Be sure to scrape the bottom of the bowl—sneaky lumps of batter have been known to hide out there.

If you have your own favorite oil-based cake recipes, you can safely replace the vegetable oil with olive oil, bake the cake, and see what you think. Butter-based cakes aren't as simply done, however. More than likely, they would require some re-balancing of the other ingredients.

RECIPES

Dark Chocolate Cake

Full of rich, deeply chocolate flavor, you'd never guess it's the olive oil that gives this cake such moistness and character. You can use a stencil design to dust the cake with confectioners' sugar, or if you have a favorite chocolate frosting, feel free to use it here. Be sure your 8-inch cake pan is at least 2 inches high; the batter almost fills it. The cake keeps at room temperature for up to four days, but it will disappear much sooner than that. *Serves eight to ten.*

Olive oil and flour for the pan

1¼ oz. (½ cup) Dutch-processed cocoa powder
(I use Droste)

1 tsp. vanilla extract

½ tsp. almond extract

4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour

¼ tsp. salt

¼ tsp. baking soda

3 large eggs plus 1 egg yolk, at room temperature

¾ cup olive oil

1½ cups sugar

¼ cup confectioners' sugar for dusting

Position a rack in the middle of the oven. Heat the oven to 325°F. Generously oil an 8x2-inch round cake pan (or an 8½-inch springform pan) with olive oil and line the bottom of the pan with parchment or waxed paper. Oil the paper and dust it lightly with flour.

In a small saucepan, boil about ½ cup of water. Meanwhile, sift the cocoa powder through a strainer over a small bowl. Stir 6 Tbs. of the boiling water into the cocoa until it's smooth and glossy (if the mixture is very thick, you can add as much as 2 Tbs. more boiling water; when I tried this cake with Hershey's cocoa, I needed to do this). Stir in the vanilla and almond extracts. Set aside to cool slightly. In another small bowl, mix together the flour, salt, and baking soda and set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the eggs and yolk, olive oil, and sugar. Using the whisk attachment, beat on medium-high speed until thick, lemon colored, and creamy, 2 to 3 min., scraping down the sides of the bowl.

Reduce the speed to low and gradually add the warm (not hot) cocoa mixture until it's well combined, scraping down the sides of the bowl once. Gradually mix in the dry ingredients until just combined, scraping down the sides of the bowl.

Pour the batter into the prepared cake pan and bake in the center of the oven until a toothpick comes out with a few moist crumbs clinging to it but with no wet batter, 55 to 60 min. Put the pan on a rack and carefully run a paring knife around the inside edge to release the cake. Let cool for 10 min. Using a second rack to sandwich the cake pan, flip the pan over. Carefully lift the pan from the cake, gently peel off and discard the paper liner, and let the cake cool completely.

Before serving, dust the top of the cake with confectioners' sugar. To use a stencil pattern, use the flat

A pretty alternative to frosting.

A dusting of confectioners' sugar is all you need to set off the rich flavor and soft, addictive texture of Dark Chocolate Cake.



side of the cake for a more level surface (the cake may dip slightly in the center; if that's the case, you'll get a cleaner design with a pattern that keeps close to the perimeter). For stencil sources, see p. 84.

Carrot Cake with Orange Cream Cheese Frosting

This cake really comes into its own on its second day, when the flavors have mellowed to perfection. *Serves twelve to fourteen.*

FOR THE CAKE:

Olive oil for the pans

1 cup sugar

1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil

9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour, sifted

2 tsp. ground cinnamon

1 tsp. grated nutmeg, preferably freshly grated

2 Tbs. baking powder

Mild and inexpensive, plain olive oil—not extra-virgin—is the wiser choice for cakes.



The last additions—carrots, pecans, and rum.
Let the batter rest so the flavors can permeate it.



Carrot cake tastes best after a day, when the frosting has set and the flavors have mellowed.

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. carrots (8 to 10 medium), peeled and cut in 1-inch chunks

4 large eggs, at room temperature

2 tsp. vanilla extract

1 cup pecans, lightly toasted, cooled, and finely chopped by pulsing in a food processor

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup dark rum

FOR THE FROSTING:

2 8-oz. packages cream cheese, somewhat softened

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey

1 Tbs. grated orange zest

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream

To make the cake—Position a rack in the middle of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Oil two 9x2-inch cake pans with olive oil, line the bottoms with parchment or waxed paper, and oil the paper.

Put both sugars and the olive oil in the bowl of a stand mixer and set aside. In a medium bowl, combine the flour, cinnamon, nutmeg, baking powder, and salt, mix well, and set aside. In a food processor fitted with the metal blade, process the carrots until they're in tiny pieces, scraping down the sides of the bowl, about 25 seconds. Measure 3 cups of carrots and set aside. In a small bowl, lightly beat the eggs with a fork, stir in the vanilla, and set aside.

Beat the sugar mixture on low until well combined, scraping down the sides of the bowl once, 2 to 3 min. (it will look like wet sand). Continuing on low speed, gradually mix in half the dry ingredients. Add the remaining dry ingredients in 3 or 4 additions, alternating with the egg mixture, and ending with the dry; scrape the sides of the bowl once or twice. Stir in the carrots, pecans, and rum, scraping the sides of the bowl once. Let the batter sit for 15 min.

Divide the batter between the cake pans (if you have a scale, weigh them to see if they're even) and bake until a toothpick inserted in the center of each comes out clean, 35 to 40 min. Cool them in the pans on a rack for 15 min. Run a paring knife around the inside edge to release the cakes. With the help of a second rack, turn each pan over so the bottom faces up, remove the pan, and carefully peel off and discard the paper liner. Using the racks again, flip each layer over so the top faces up again. Let cool completely.

To make the frosting—When the layers are cool, put the cream cheese, honey, and orange zest in the bowl of a stand mixer and whip on high until smooth and light, 1 to 2 min., scraping the sides of the bowl. Add the cream and whip on medium, scraping the sides of the bowl, just until you see tracks from the whip or beaters, 1 to 2 min.

To frost the cake—Set one cake layer on a cardboard base or other support (like a removable tart pan bottom) and spread it evenly with about one-third of the frosting. Set the second layer on top and cover the top smoothly (or with little swirls) with about one-third more of the frosting. Coat the sides evenly with a very thin layer of frosting, and then use what remains to finish the sides with a second coat. Refrigerate the cake for several hours—this firms up the frosting and mellows the flavors—but give it some time at room temperature before serving to take off the chill.

Plum & Blueberry Upside-Down Cake

For this cake, thinly sliced Italian plums are strewn into the bottom of a pan, the batter is poured in, and then blueberries are scattered over. During baking, many of the blueberries drift to the bottom. When you flip the cake over, the bottom becomes a charmingly old-fashioned, glistening, fruit-laden top. Add a dollop of unsweetened whipped cream or vanilla ice cream, and you're there. Just try to use the freshest, sweetest fruit you can find at this time of year. *Serves eight.*

Olive oil and sugar for the pan

5 to 6 small Italian purple plums, ripe but firm, rinsed, dried, and sliced ½ inch thick (at the thickest part), about 1 generous cup

5 oz. (1¼ cups) cake flour (not self-rising)

½ tsp. baking soda

¼ tsp. salt

¾ cup sugar

½ cup buttermilk

¼ cup olive oil

1 tsp. vanilla extract

3 large eggs, separated, at room temperature

1 tsp. grated lemon zest

1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice

1 cup blueberries, picked over for stems, rinsed, and dried well (or frozen blueberries, thawed and drained well)

1 tsp. all-purpose flour

Position a rack in the middle of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Oil a 9-inch springform cake pan with olive oil and dust with sugar. Arrange the plums in a single layer on the bottom of the pan.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the cake flour, baking soda, salt, and ½ cup of the sugar. In a small bowl, combine the buttermilk, olive oil, vanilla, and egg yolks. Stir the mixture lightly with a fork.

With the mixer on low speed, gradually pour the liquids into the dry mixture to make a smooth batter, 1 to 2 min. Add the lemon zest and lemon juice and combine briefly again, scraping down the sides of the bowl at least once. If any lumps remain, increase the speed to medium for about 30 seconds to smooth them out. Set the batter aside.

In another large stand mixer bowl (transfer the cake batter to another bowl if you have only one), whip the egg whites on medium speed until they form soft peaks, about 2 min. Increase the speed to high and gradually add the remaining ¼ cup sugar in a steady stream, scraping down the sides of the bowl after all the sugar has been added. Continue whipping the whites until they're very stiff, about 3 min.

Pour about half of the reserved cake batter over the whites and, using a whisk, gently stir it in by hand until the batter is lightened but not quite blended, just a few strokes. Pour in the remaining batter and gently whisk it in until it's well incorporated and there are no white streaks. Pour the batter into the prepared pan with the plums. Put the blueberries in a small bowl, toss them gently with the 1 tsp. flour, and then scatter them over the batter. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 50 to 60 min. Cool



Purple plums disappear for now, but when this upside-down cake gets unmolded, the fruit comes out on top.

Blueberries start out on top, but during baking, they journey through the batter to join the plums.

the cake on a rack for 10 min. and remove the ring. Cool the cake another 5 min. and turn it over onto another rack or plate. Very slowly lift off the pan base, inch by inch, nudging loose any resisting fruit with a spatula. Let the cake cool before transferring it to a serving plate.

Leslie Revsin was a chef for many years at several New York City restaurants, including her own bistro. She's working on her second cookbook. ♦



Whether you use a knife or mandoline, the goal is thin, even potato slices, which will cook quickly and at the same rate.

The Spanish Tortilla

Is the Best of All Omelets

Transform potatoes, onions, and eggs into a delicious dinner, breakfast, lunch, or snack



This isn't deep-frying. The potatoes will sizzle and the oil will bubble, but the potatoes shouldn't get brown or crisp.



A hot pan is as good as nonstick. As long as the pan is very hot when the potatoes, onions, and eggs are poured in, the tortilla will release in one piece.

Photos: Sarah Jay



BY SARAH JAY

A well-made Spanish tortilla is so good, so satisfying in every way, that I would nominate it to the Great Food Hall of Fame, if only there were such a thing. It has nothing to do with Mexican flour or corn tortillas. If it has a relative, it would be the Italian frittata.

In Spain, the dish goes by two names: *tortilla de patatas* or *tortilla española*. The one thing I avoid calling it is a potato omelet (its English translation) since a Spanish tortilla is more about potatoes than eggs, and the word omelet doesn't really conjure up the right image. Besides, a tortilla is more robust and gratifying than any omelet—and infinitely more versatile. It tastes great whether served warm, cool, or at room temperature. It makes an excellent breakfast, lunch, dinner, snack, or crowd-pleasing tapa. (A tortilla is a sure hit at any party or pot luck.) It can be made ahead, it's reasonably fast cooking (45 minutes, start to finish), and it welcomes variations. At my house, we rarely go more than a week without having one for supper. Taste the magnificent *tortilla española* for yourself, and you'll know why.

I learned how to make tortillas from my Spanish husband, Isidro, who can stroll into the kitchen, peel and slice some potatoes, chop about half as many onions, lightly beat five or six eggs, and with no apparent thought, turn out a perfect tortilla every time. He insists there's nothing to it, and I agree, now that I'm clued in to the few tricks he'd been keeping secret. Here's how to turn five fairly pedestrian ingredients—potatoes, eggs, onions, olive oil, and salt—into a dish that deserves more fame and glory than any other, except perhaps paella (yes, there's a theme here).

Low-starch potatoes work best

I've used everything from small red potatoes to oblong Idaho russets in tortillas. Any potato will do the job, but I like boiling potatoes, red potatoes, and Yukon Golds best because they have a lower starch content and don't fall apart during frying. I also prefer their firmer texture.

Aim for thin, consistent slices. If you own a mandoline or a V-slicer, set the thickness to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. Or else use a sharp chef's knife, slicing the potatoes as thinly as possible without making it a slow, laborious chore—asmidge thinner than the binding of this magazine is a good goal. Thicker slices not only take longer to cook but also make a dry tortilla.

To achieve the lovely layered effect in this tortilla, be gentle with the potatoes so they don't get crushed during cooking.

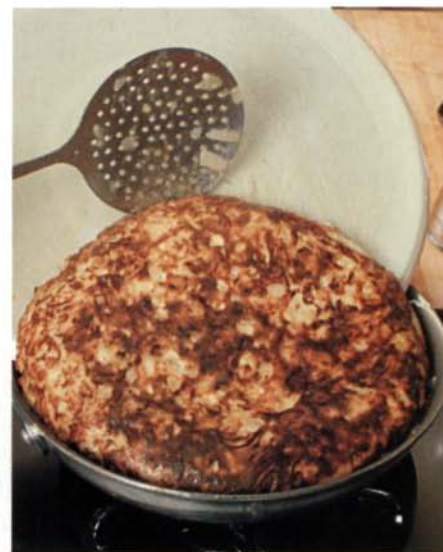
For an attractive, evenly browned tortilla, do “the flip”



When the eggs are mostly cooked, set a flat, rimless plate over the pan. Don't forget to give the pan a good shake to confirm that the tortilla is loose.



Holding the plate firmly in place, invert the pan so the tortilla falls onto the plate.



Slide the tortilla back into the skillet, pushing any stray potatoes underneath. Tuck around the perimeter to round and neaten the edges.

The potatoes are cooked in a generous amount of oil, but don't worry, most of it stays in the pan. (The oil can be strained and reused.) Although the oil temperature is much lower than it is for deep-frying, you should use an oil with a high enough smoke point. I use plain olive oil (*not* extra-virgin) or else corn oil.

You'll need a deep, nonstick skillet

You can make a tortilla with the barest of kitchen equipment, just a bowl and a skillet. The pan must be deep enough to contain all the potatoes and should preferably have gently sloping sides to give the tortilla its shape, which is like a Frisbee. For the recipe that follows, a 10½-inch skillet that's at least 1½ inches deep is ideal. The sliced potatoes will fill the pan, which is fine as long as you turn them carefully as they cook in the oil. Though I'm not usually a fan of nonstick skillets, I do embrace them for tortillas. A tortilla that won't release cleanly from the pan isn't a total disaster, but it is irritating, and messy.

Heat the oil until a potato slice sizzles but doesn't brown. You're not making french fries—you're cooking potatoes until they're tender inside yet soft and pale outside. If a few slices do get golden and crispy, it's no big deal (actually, they're delicious and quite tempting to eat), but remember that this

isn't the point. The chopped onions cook the same way. If the pan is deep enough, you can speed things along by cooking the onions and potatoes together, adding the onions to the pan when the potatoes are about halfway done.

Once the potatoes and onions are cooked and drained, they're added to the beaten eggs. Some Spaniards let the egg and potato mixture sit for a short time, maybe 15 minutes, so the potatoes absorb some of the eggs. I don't find that necessary, but it's okay to do it, if you want. Other cooks crush the potatoes a bit as they sit in the eggs. That is *not* okay, in my opinion, as it ruins the layered effect that you get in the finished tortilla.

The egg, potato, and onion mixture gets cooked in the same pan that you used to fry

the potatoes and onions. Here's where a little knowledge goes a long way.

♦ **Wipe out the skillet.** If it's not nonstick, use a spatula to scrape out any stuck-on bits, and then wipe out the pan with a wadded paper towel.

♦ **To prevent sticking, heat the skillet on high.** In a hot pan, the eggs coagulate immediately, before they have time to fill the tiny pores in the pan and stick to it. It doesn't matter how much oil you add to the pan—if it isn't hot enough when the eggs go in, the tortilla won't come out in one piece.

A potato tortilla answers the eternal question: what's for dinner tonight?

◆ **After the mixture cooks for a minute, reduce the heat.** This ensures that the inside sets before the outside burns. A low temperature also seems to make the eggs firmer and denser, which is what you want in a tortilla.

Pick a large, flat plate for flipping

The dramatic climax of tortilla making comes when the eggs have mostly set and the tortilla is ready to be flipped. This is what makes a tortilla different from an Italian frittata (where the pan goes in the oven to finish cooking the eggs).

Give the pan a good shake to release the tortilla. If it isn't loose in the pan, help it along with a spatula. The eggs will be a little jiggly and wet in the center, but the tortilla should slide around as a whole unit.

Find a flat plate that's at least as wide as the pan and has no rim. (In Spain, there exists a special plate whose sole purpose is to flip tortillas—what devotion.) To do the flip, you'll invert the tortilla onto the plate and then slide it back into the pan to finish cooking (see the photos at left).

You can eat the tortilla right away, or chill it and have it for lunch the next day (a wedge on a baguette is how it's usually done). To my taste, a tortilla hits its peak an hour or so after cooking.

RECIPE

Spanish Potato Tortilla (Tortilla Española)

If you have a mandoline, this would be a great time to use it. *Serves four as a main course; twelve as a tapa.*

1¾ cups vegetable oil for frying (I use plain olive oil, but never a great extra-virgin)

1¾ lb. (about 5 medium) low- to medium-starch potatoes, such as Yukon Gold, peeled

2¼ tsp. coarse salt

12 to 14 oz. onions (2 to 3 medium), diced

5 medium cloves garlic, very coarsely chopped (optional)

6 large eggs

½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper (optional)

In a 10½-inch nonstick skillet that's at least 1½ inches deep, heat the oil on medium high. While the oil is heating, slice the potatoes thinly, about ⅛ inch. Transfer to a bowl and sprinkle on 2 tsp. of the salt, tossing to distribute it well.

When the oil is very hot (a potato slice will sizzle vigorously around the edges without browning), gently slip the potatoes into the oil with a skimmer or slotted spoon. Fry the potatoes, turning occasionally (trying not to break them) and adjusting the heat so they sizzle but don't crisp or brown. Set a sieve over a bowl or else line a plate with paper towels. When the potatoes are tender, after 10 to 12 min., transfer them with the skimmer to the sieve or lined plate.

Add the onions and garlic (if using) to the pan. Fry, stirring occasionally, until the onions are very soft and translucent but not browned (you might need to lower

the heat), 7 to 9 min. Remove the pan from the heat and, using the skimmer, transfer the onions and garlic to the sieve or plate with the potatoes. Drain the oil from the skillet, reserving at least 1 Tbs. (strain the rest and reserve to use again, if you like) and wipe out the pan with a paper towel so it's clean. Scrape out any stuck-on bits, if necessary.

In a large bowl, beat the eggs, ¼ tsp. salt, and the pepper (if using) with a fork until blended. Add the drained potatoes, onions, and garlic and mix gently to combine with the egg, trying not to break the potatoes (some will anyway).

Heat the skillet on medium high. Add the 1 Tbs. reserved oil. Let the pan and oil get very hot (important so the eggs don't stick), and then pour in the potato and egg mixture, spreading it evenly. Cook for 1 min. and then lower the heat to medium low, cooking until the eggs are completely set at the edges, halfway set in the center, and the tortilla easily slips around in the pan when you give it a shake, 8 to 10 min. You may need to nudge the tortilla loose with a knife or spatula.

Set a flat, rimless plate that's at least as wide as the skillet upside down over the pan. Lift the skillet off the burner and, with one hand against the plate and the other holding the skillet's handle, invert the skillet so the tortilla lands on the plate (it should fall right out). Set the pan back on the heat and slide the tortilla into it, using the skimmer to push any stray potatoes back in under the eggs as the tortilla slides off the plate. Once the tortilla is back in the pan, tuck the edges in and under itself (to neaten the sides). Cook until a skewer inserted into the center comes out clean, hot, and with no uncooked egg on it, another 5 to 6 min.

Transfer the tortilla to a serving platter and let cool at least 10 min. Serve warm, at room temperature, or slightly cool. Cut into wedges or small squares, sticking a toothpick in each square if serving as an appetizer.

Sarah Jay is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ◆

More ways to enjoy a tortilla

I could happily eat a plain potato-and-onion tortilla every night for dinner, but sometimes change is good. Instead of, or in addition to, the potatoes and onions, try adding the following to the beaten eggs:

- ◆ **Sautéed chorizo, bacon, or cured ham.**
- ◆ **Other sautéed vegetables, such as asparagus, string beans, or sliced mushrooms or zucchini, all of which cook faster and in much less oil than the potatoes.**
- ◆ **Grated or diced cheese, such as manchego, sharp Cheddar, Parmesan, or crumbled feta or Roquefort.**
- ◆ **Chopped fresh herbs, such as thyme, basil, or parsley.**

New York Style Bagels



Starting with a sponge improves flavor and shelf life and makes a bagel that freezes and thaws beautifully.



As good as they used to be. Golden outside, chewy inside, these crusty bagels have all the markings of a classic water bagel.

For the chewy crumb and shiny crust coveted by true bagel fans, use the right flour and boil the dough before baking

BY PETER REINHART



For classic bagel flavor, Peter Reinhart adds malt powder or syrup to the dough. Honey or brown sugar are acceptable substitutes.



A stiff dough takes time to fully knead. Get it started in a stand mixer and finish working it by hand.

frame of reference is limited—they're too young to have bagel memories from "the good old days"). Even better testimonials come from my friends who were raised in New York City (the self-declared center of the bagel universe) and from my wife, Susan, who, like me, grew up in the bagel mecca of Philadelphia. We all feel that these bagels are real winners, every bit as good as they used to be.

High-gluten flour gives a good "chew"

Classic bagels require two ingredients that you won't find in most home bakers' pantries. One is high-gluten flour, and the other is malt syrup.

A high-protein flour makes bagels with a tight, springy crumb. When mixed with water and kneaded, the protein fragments in the flour form gluten, which is what gives bagel dough its strength, elasticity, and chewiness. High-gluten flour contains the most gluten protein of all flours: up to 14½ percent, compared to 12 percent in bread flour and 10 percent in all-purpose flour.

You can get high-gluten flour through baking catalogs (see Sources, p. 84), at natural food markets (it might be called unbleached hard spring wheat flour—don't confuse it with vital wheat gluten), or by throwing yourself upon the mercy of your local bagel bakery: say you're on a quest to make a great bagel and would love to buy a few pounds of flour. You'd be surprised how well this works.

If high-gluten flour eludes you, use bread flour, preferably unbleached. The bagels will be softer but still quite good. All-purpose flour, however, doesn't contain enough gluten to make a proper bagel.

Malt syrup, a sweetener, gives bagels their characteristic flavor. It can often be obtained from



To knead by hand, push your heel into the dough a few times, rocking slightly with each stroke, before turning the dough, folding it, and pushing into it again.

There are two kinds of people in the world: those who favor chewy boiled bagels and those who like the soft steamed versions. I'm in the first camp. A chewy, dense interior and a thick, golden crust are the trademarks of what I consider a "true" bagel, which is to say the bagels I ate as a kid. It's called a water bagel, or a boiled bagel, because the proofed, shaped dough gets poached in a pot of boiling water before it's baked.

Steamed bagels, on the other hand, are big, pale, and soft-crust, almost fluffy by comparison. Made from a softer dough, they're baked in steam-injected ovens, not poached. Because they're so much more efficient to make, the steamed variety have taken over the bagel mass market.

But don't mourn the classic boiled bagel—it's not extinct yet. As a professional baker, bread instructor, and water bagel guy, I've been perfecting my recipe for a number of years. By applying some artisan breadbaking techniques, specifically a sponge starter and a slow, cool overnight rise, I can now claim a bagel that equals, perhaps even betters, those of my childhood memories.

My culinary students at Johnson & Wales University love these bagels (though I must admit their



A “windowpane” means kneading is complete. The ragged membrane should stretch without tearing, indicating the gluten has been fully developed.



Shape the dough into smooth balls. Pull the dough down and around to one point on the bottom, pinching it closed.



A brief rest under a damp towel makes shaping easier. After 20 minutes, the gluten has relaxed and the dough is more responsive.

the same sources where you'll find high-gluten flour. At natural food markets, it might be called barley malt syrup. Malt powder is fine too.

Some malt products are labeled diastatically active; others are nondiastatic. Both types will contribute that familiar bagel-shop flavor and texture. But diastatic malt has a slight edge—it contains active enzymes that help break down carbohydrates and release the flour's natural sugars, improving flavor even more. If you can't get malt, substituting honey or brown sugar also gives wonderful results.

A sponge starter improves flavor

In all of my bread travels, I've never found a bagel shop that uses a sponge starter. I'm convinced, however, that it not only helps the bagels' flavor and texture but also makes them freeze and thaw better.

Artisan bread bakers know that longer, slower fermentation of their doughs improves the flavor and shelf-life of their products. The bagel sponge starter plays off this principle by getting fermentation started even before you make the dough (that's why the starter is sometimes called a pre-ferment).

There's nothing complicated about making the sponge: it's a mixture of yeast, high-gluten flour, and water that sits at room temperature for about two hours, while the yeast begins converting the natural wheat sugars into carbon dioxide and ethanol. The foamy, fermented mixture is then combined with flour and other ingredients to make the dough.

An overnight rise in the refrigerator also extends fermentation. The overnight rise, called the “retarding” of the dough because it slows the fermentation, allows naturally occurring enzymes (as well

as any enzymes provided by the malt) to release their flavors. Making a bagel without this step is like drinking a fine wine immediately after it's been bottled—the flavors are there in potential but they need time to mature. Actually, letting a fine wine age and giving bread dough a long, slow, cool fermentation both accomplish the same thing: they give the yeast enzymes time to break down big, complex sugar molecules into smaller, more flavorful ones. (For more on fermentation, see Food Science, p. 80.)

A stiff dough needs lots of kneading

Bagel dough is one of the stiffest doughs in the bread kingdom. The firmness makes bagels with a dense, resilient crumb, and it also allows the proofed bagels to withstand the brutality of the boiling stage without losing their shape. Try to boil a bagel using, say, French bread dough, and it will flop around, deflate, and turn out flat and oblong.

How much flour does it take to get a stiff dough? Hard to say exactly, since every brand of flour absorbs liquid differently. I teach my students to feel their way into the dough and to let it tell them what it needs. You're aiming for a firm but still pliable dough with all ingredients hydrated. It's easier to add more flour than it is to add water, especially to a stiff dough, so sprinkle in that last cup of flour gradually during mixing and kneading.

A lengthy knead stretches and develops the dough. Kneading helps disperse ingredients in the dough, it hydrates the yeast so fermentation can begin, and it develops the gluten bonds that give bread its strength and structure. Bagel dough takes a lot of kneading. I start the process in a stand mixer



Poke a hole in the center and then stretch and squeeze the dough to get an even ring all around. A lopsided shape only becomes exaggerated during baking.



Before letting the bagels rise, mist them with oil and cover with plastic wrap, which keeps a skin from forming.

fitted with a dough hook, but after five or six minutes, the machine inevitably starts to struggle. At that point, I take the dough out and continue kneading by hand.

If you're kneading entirely by hand, be prepared to spend a good 15 minutes or more at the task. Don't worry about overkneading this dough; your muscles will give out before the gluten in the dough does.

Kneading is complete when the dough can be stretched into a "windowpane." Cut off a piece of dough about the size of a dinner roll. Gently stretch, pull, and rotate the piece until the center becomes thin and translucent (see the photo opposite). If the dough has enough flour and has been well kneaded, it will be firm, stretchy, supple, and satiny, but not tacky, and you'll be able to poke your finger into it cleanly.

Baking soda in the poaching water puts a shine on the crust

The boiling, or poaching, step is a controversial technique that runs up against family customs. Some people insist that salt, sugar, honey, or milk, or some combination of all of those, must be added to the boiling water. Many bagel shops use a food-grade lye, and others use nothing but pure water.

I've made bagels every which way, and I've found that what gets added to the boiling water isn't as critical as how long the bagels stay in it. Boiling gelatinizes the surface starches, giving the bagels a shiny appearance and a distinctive chewy quality. A minute of boiling on each side is about right.

As for the poaching liquid itself, I spike the water with baking soda to alkalize it. This results in more

shine and caramelization of the crust when the bagels bake. It's a subtle effect, but it may be the final touch that converts those die-hards who insist that nothing can ever match the legendary bagels of their youth.

RECIPE

Classic Water Bagels

Look for malt syrup at natural food stores under the name barley malt syrup and for malt powder at beer-making supply shops or through baking catalogs; see Sources on p. 84. Be sure to use instant or quick-rise yeast (available in most supermarkets)—*not* active dry. *Yields 12 large or 24 mini bagels.*

FOR THE SPONGE:

18 oz. (4 cups) unbleached high-gluten flour (or bread flour)

1 tsp. instant or quick-rise yeast

2½ cups lukewarm water (about 70°F)

FOR THE BAGEL DOUGH:

½ tsp. instant or quick-rise yeast

About 18 oz. (4 cups) unbleached high-gluten flour (or bread flour); more as needed

¾ oz. salt (1 to 1½ Tbs., depending on the coarseness)

2 tsp. malt powder or 1 Tbs. malt syrup, honey, or brown sugar

FOR SHAPING, BOILING & BAKING:

Vegetable oil spray

1 Tbs. baking soda

Cornmeal or semolina flour

Sesame seeds, poppy seeds, kosher salt, finely chopped onions tossed in a little oil, or rehydrated dried minced garlic for topping the bagels

To make the sponge—In a 4-qt. bowl, mix the flour and the 1 tsp. yeast. Add the water, whisking or stirring only until it forms a smooth, sticky dough (it



The cold-water "float test." If a bagel rises within ten seconds, the batch is ready for the overnight rise in the fridge.

One minute of boiling per side provides a shiny, chewy crust. For even more chew, push it to two minutes per side.



Toppings stick to a wet surface. Sprinkle on poppy seeds, sesame seeds, salt, or nothing at all.



A tight, perfect crumb. Honor it with a smear of cream cheese, a layer of lox, and a thick slice of a juicy, ripe tomato.



should be thick but batter-like). Cover with plastic wrap and leave at room temperature until the mixture is very foamy and bubbly, 1 to 2 hours. It should swell to nearly double in size and collapse when the bowl is tapped on the counter.

To make the bagel dough—In a stand mixer bowl (or in a mixing bowl, if kneading by hand), stir together the sponge and the ½ tsp. yeast. In a bowl, mix together 3 cups of the flour with the salt. Add it to the sponge, along with the malt, honey, or sugar. Using a dough hook, mix on the lowest speed, or knead by hand, slowly working in the remaining flour until the dough is stiff, dry, and almost satiny; you may need extra flour or have some leftover. Keep kneading on low until the dough is very stiff and firm but still pliable, satiny, and smooth, about 6 min. by machine or 15 min. by hand. If the dough rides up the hook, stop the machine, pull it down, add a bit of flour, and continue. When the machine starts to struggle, remove the dough and finish kneading by hand. The dough at this point should be much stiffer than French bread dough and shouldn't be tacky—a finger poked into the dough should come out clean. There shouldn't be any visible raw flour, and the dough will feel neither cool nor warm, about 80°F.

To check the dough, pinch off a small piece and gently stretch it while turning it. It should form a thin, translucent membrane. If it rips, the dough hasn't been kneaded enough or else it's too dry and needs a few drops of water.

Divide the dough into 12 pieces, each weighing about 4¾ oz. for regular bagels. (For mini bagels, divide it into 24 pieces, each weighing just under 2½ oz.) Wipe the counter with a damp towel to remove any flour dust. Shape each piece into a smooth ball by pulling the dough down and around to one point on the bottom (see the photo on p. 70) and then pinching the bottom closed. Cover with a damp towel and let rest for 20 min. so the gluten relaxes.

To shape, boil, and bake the bagels—Line two baking sheets with parchment and spray the paper with vegetable oil.

To shape the bagels, poke a hole in the center of each ball of dough with your thumb and then gently rotate the dough around both thumbs, slightly squeezing and stretching the dough little by little as you turn until the hole has enlarged to 1½ to 2 inches. The dough ring should be an even thickness all around.

Set the shaped bagels on the prepared pans so they're 2 inches apart. Mist the bagels very lightly with vegetable oil and cover the pans with plastic (the wrap keeps the dough from developing a skin, which would restrict the rise). Let the bagels sit at room temperature until they swell slightly, by about 15 to 20%. Start checking them after 15 min., doing the "float test" to see if they're ready to be retarded in the refrigerator.

To do the float test, fill a bowl with cold water. Drop one bagel in the water. If it floats within 10 seconds, the bagels are ready for the overnight rise, or retarding. Pat dry the tester bagel and return it to the pan. (If it doesn't float within 10 seconds, shake or pat it dry, return it to the pan, and test it again every 10 min. until it floats.) Refrigerate the pans, still covered, for at least 8 hours, or up to 2 days.

When you're ready to bake the bagels, heat the oven to 500°F. Bring a large pot of water to a boil (the wider the pot, the better), and add the baking soda;

have ready a slotted spoon or skimmer. Remove one pan of bagels from the fridge. Slide the parchment along with the dough onto the counter. Line the pan with a clean sheet of parchment, mist with vegetable oil, and sprinkle with cornmeal or semolina flour.

Gently drop the bagels into the water (it doesn't matter which side goes in first), boiling only as many as will comfortably fit; they should float within 10 seconds, if not immediately. Boil for 1 min., flip them over, and boil for another 1 min. For very chewy bagels, boil for 2 min. per side. As the

bagels finish cooking, lift them out with the skimmer and set them on the baking sheet with the cornmeal or semolina, top side up. If you're sprinkling sesame or poppy seeds, kosher salt, chopped onions, or minced garlic on the bagels, do so now. (I like a combination of seeds and salt; be judicious with the salt.)

When the bagels on the first pan are boiled and topped, bake for 10 min., rotate the pan for even browning, and then continue baking until golden brown on top and bottom and very firm, about another 5 min. Remove the pan from the oven and transfer the bagels to a cooling rack. Let cool for at least 10 min. Meanwhile, remove the second pan of bagels from the fridge and boil and bake them the same way.

Cinnamon-Raisin Bagels

For cinnamon-raisin bagels, increase the yeast in the bagel dough (not the sponge) to 1 tsp., and add 1 Tbs. ground cinnamon and 5 Tbs. sugar in with the flour. At the start of mixing, add 1½ to 2 loosely packed cups raisins, rinsed with warm water and well dried (to wash off surface sugar, acid, and wild yeast). For a cinnamon-sugar crust, after baking, brush the bagels with melted butter and dip in cinnamon sugar while they're still hot.

*Peter Reinhart, the author of *Crust & Crumb* (Ten Speed Press) and *Bread Upon the Waters* (Perseus Books), teaches breadbaking at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island. ♦*

Making the Creamiest Rice Pudding

Milk—not cream—makes a silky pudding, and ingredients like coffee, caramel, ginger—even coconut—make variation exciting

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Creamy, vanilla-scented, soothing, and satisfying, rice pudding is one of my all-time-favorite comfort foods. And I know I'm not alone. Just the mention of rice pudding elicits more "oohs," "mmms," and "aaahs" than other desserts seem to. (When I was testing recipes for this story, quite a few more neighbors than usual offered to come take the leftovers off my hands.)

Yet rice pudding can be downright awful when not made the right way. I have a few tricks for getting the creamiest results, including using medium-grain rice, milk (not cream), and a two-step stovetop cooking method where you cook the rice in milk and then stir in eggs to make a custard. After you've tried my Classic Rice Pudding (p. 75), use it as the springboard for delicious variations. Try the ginger *crème caramel* style and baked brown rice puddings, too. While keeping silky consistency and creamy flavor as their trademarks, they each offer a tasty departure from the traditional.

Eggs add rich flavor and custardy texture

The ingredients in rice pudding are simple ones, but a few important choices ensure the best outcome.

Medium-grain rice throws off the right amount of starch to thicken the pudding and make it creamy. At the same time, it stays tender through the cooking without breaking apart, which keeps the pudding from turning mushy. I've tried long-grain rice, but it doesn't stay intact and is less starchy, so the finished pudding is less creamy. Arborio and other short-grain rices, which are even starchier than medium grain, make a thick, sticky pudding and maintain too firm a bite for a smooth, tender result.

For a luscious pudding, I prefer milk rather than cream, oddly enough. The combination of the rice



Laced with vanilla, creamy as custard, the best rice pudding has grains that melt in your mouth.



Creamy pudding needs slow, gentle cooking so the rice is tender and the milk is reduced.



Stop to measure. The cooked-down milk and rice should total 3 1/2 cups.



starch and gently simmered milk produces a thick, rich rice pudding that belies its not-so-rich milk base. I avoid cream because it reduces and thickens before the rice cooks through—a dense, chewy pudding with a fatty mouth-feel being the result. The only exception is the Baked Brown Rice Pudding (p. 76), where a combination of heavy cream and evaporated milk gives the smoothest texture (brown rice needs longer baking, which would cause the milk to break, with a curdled, watery result).

Not all rice puddings are custard based, of course, but I like the added richness of stirring in beaten egg yolks after the rice is tender. The pudding color changes from bright white to mellow yellow, while the eggs add luxurious texture and deeper flavor.

For silky, fluid pudding, slow cooking is key

Rice pudding needs low heat in both stages of cooking.

When cooking the rice and milk, simmer gently until the rice is tender and the milk is reduced. For the classic recipe, the mixture should measure 3 1/2 cups before you add the eggs. This measuring step might seem cumbersome, but it's the best way to ensure fluid texture (at least until you've tried it a few times and you're familiar with the cooked rice's final consistency). If you find that you've cooked the rice down to less than 3 1/2 cups, add a little milk to make up the difference. The mixture may look a little soupy, but don't worry: the pudding tightens as it cools, and if you let the milk and rice cook down any further, the pudding will be gloppy and stiff after cooling. (If you've ever made risotto and noticed how much stock it drinks up toward the end of cook-



Add the egg yolks and then cook briefly and gently. The pudding is done when it coats the back of a spoon.

"Until you've made this a few times, measuring is the best way to make sure the milk and rice are cooked to the right degree," says Abby Dodge.

ing and as it sits, you'll know what I mean.) The Baked Brown Rice Pudding, too, may look a little loose when you pull it out of the oven, but the pudding firms up as it cools.

After adding the egg yolks, simmer gently so you don't curdle the custard. You'll do this by returning the mixture to the heat right after the yolks go in and by cooking it gently for about two minutes, just until thick enough to coat the back of a spoon. Thickening can happen quickly, so keep watch to make sure you don't reduce the pudding too much or cook it on too high a heat, scrambling the eggs.

Fortunately, it's easy to loosen up rice pudding that may come out too stiff despite all your precautions. If you've already added the eggs and the pudding isn't quite fluid enough after being cooled, add just enough cream so the pudding is looser, as you'd loosen risotto by stirring in a bit more stock right before serving.

RECIPES

Classic Rice Pudding

When using a vanilla bean, I like to leave it in the pudding and then scrape out the seeds after the pudding has cooled. The seeds scrape out more easily from the softened bean, and the pudding gets an additional boost from the extra time the bean sits in it. This pudding is great as is, and it serves as the base for the variations at right. *Serves four.*

4 cups whole milk

½ cup raw medium-grain white rice

Pinch salt

1 vanilla bean, split, or 1½ tsp. vanilla extract

2 large egg yolks

⅓ cup sugar

Dump the milk, rice, salt, and split vanilla bean into a large, heavy saucepan (if you're using vanilla extract, don't add it yet). Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer gently, stirring occasionally, for 15 min. Uncover and continue simmering, stirring frequently, until the rice is tender and the pudding is reduced to about 3½ cups, about 8 min. It's important to let the pudding simmer gently, not boil, and you'll need to stir constantly toward the end of cooking to prevent scorching.

In a medium bowl, whisk the egg yolks, sugar, and vanilla extract (if using). Slowly add the cooked rice mixture, whisking constantly. Pour the mixture back into the saucepan, making sure to scrape the bowl. Set the pan over medium-low heat and cook, stirring and scraping the sides and bottom of the pan constantly with a wooden spoon, until the mixture has thickened and coats the back of the spoon, about 1 min. Remove the pan from the heat. Transfer the pudding to a bowl or serving dish and lay a sheet of plastic wrap right on the pudding's surface to prevent a skin from forming. If you've used a vanilla bean, fish it out when the pudding has cooled, scrape out the seeds, and stir the scrapings into the pudding. Discard the empty bean. Serve warm, at room temperature, or chilled. *(Continued)*

Variations on classic rice pudding

Use one recipe of Classic Rice Pudding (at left) to make these variations. *All serve four.*



THAI-STYLE RICE PUDDING

In the classic recipe, substitute one 14-oz. can of coconut milk for 2 cups of the whole milk. Omit the vanilla bean and substitute ¼ tsp. coconut extract and ½ tsp. vanilla extract. Garnish with shredded toasted coconut and sliced fresh mango.



SWEDISH-STYLE RICE PUDDING

Whip ¾ cup cold heavy cream until it forms medium-firm peaks. Gently fold it into a batch of chilled Classic Rice Pudding.



COFFEE RICE PUDDING

Add 2 tsp. instant espresso powder to the classic recipe at the same time you add the vanilla extract, and proceed with the recipe as directed. Serve with a dollop of whipped cream and either a crisp chocolate cookie or shaved chocolate.



RASPBERRY PARFAIT RICE PUDDING

In four small wineglasses or parfait cups, alternately layer chilled Classic Rice Pudding and fresh raspberries, starting with the pudding and finishing with a few raspberries. (For a special touch, garnish with a nasturtium or another edible flower.)

RICE PUDDING SOUFFLE

Heat the oven to 400°F.

Butter the bottom and sides of a shallow 2-qt. baking dish; dust with sugar. Whip the whites of 3 large eggs until foamy. Continue to beat on high speed while gradually adding 2 Tbs. sugar. Beat the

whites until they form medium-firm peaks. Gently fold the whites into a well-chilled batch of Classic Rice Pudding. Spoon into the prepared dish; bake until puffed and golden, 25 to 30 min. Serve immediately with your favorite bittersweet chocolate sauce (see *Fine Cooking* #30, p. 56, or the sauce guide in *Fine Cooking* #38).



Baked Brown Rice Pudding

This one is my family's favorite. Brown rice gives a deep, nutty flavor, while a sugared nut topping delivers crunch. Precooking the rice shaves off half the baking time. *Serves four to six.*

FOR THE PUDDING:

½ cup raw brown rice
⅓ cup packed dark brown sugar
¼ cup raisins
1 tsp. vanilla extract
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
Pinch ground nutmeg
Pinch salt
1 can (12 oz.) evaporated milk
1½ cups heavy cream

FOR THE TOPPING:

1 Tbs. unsalted butter
4 oz. (1 cup) walnuts, chopped medium coarse
2 Tbs. sugar

No mixing bowl needed. Combine the ingredients for Brown Rice Pudding right in the baking dish.

Put the rice in a medium saucepan and cover with water by 2 inches. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer until the rice is tender, about 30 min. It should still have a little bite to it. Heat the oven to 300°F. Have ready a shallow, 2-qt. baking dish. When the rice is cooked, drain it well in a fine-mesh sieve and put it in the baking dish. Add the brown sugar, raisins, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt to the rice. Wipe out the rice saucepan and add the evaporated milk and heavy cream. Over medium-high heat, bring the liquids barely to a boil and then pour them into the baking dish. Stir the mixture a few times until the ingredients are well dispersed and the sugar has dissolved. Bake until the top is browned, the liquid is reduced and thick, and the rice is tender, 1½ to 2 hours.

Meanwhile, make the topping—In a small skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the chopped nuts and sprinkle on the sugar. Cook over medium heat, stirring often to ensure even browning, until the nuts are toasted and the sugar is caramelized, about 10 min. Remove from the heat and immediately transfer to a bowl to cool completely. Just before serving, break the cooled nut topping apart and scatter over the entire pudding before serving.



A sugared walnut topping adds roasty flavor and crunchy texture to Baked Brown Rice Pudding.

Gingered Crème Caramel Rice Pudding

One of my favorite types of white rice is fragrant Jasmati, so I came up with this recipe as a way to use some I had left over. If you're using leftover rice that was salted for cooking, omit the pinch of salt in the recipe list below. *Serves six.*

FOR THE CARAMEL:

½ cup sugar
½ cup water

FOR THE PUDDING:

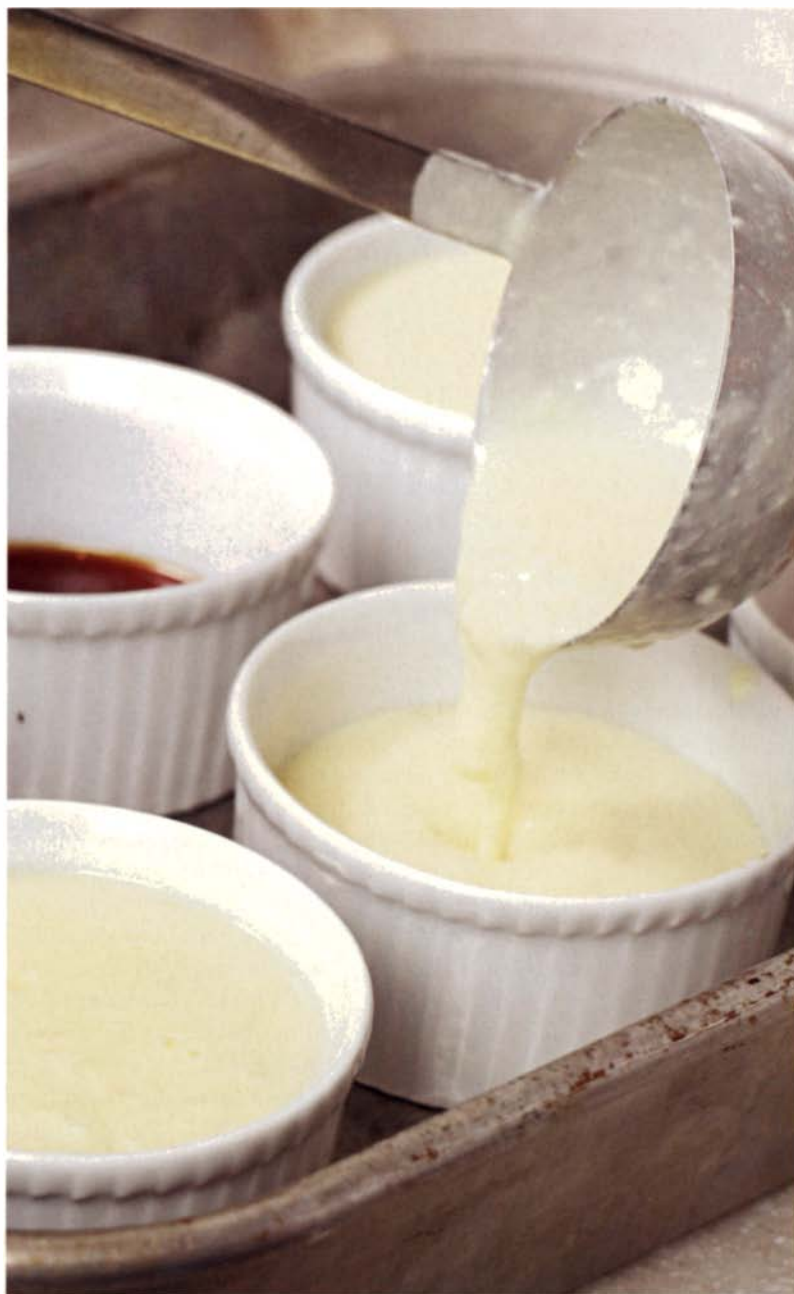
2 cups whole milk
¾ cup cooked white rice (from ¼ cup raw)
¾-inch piece (½ oz.) fresh ginger, peeled and cut in 4 slices
¼ cup sugar
Pinch salt (see the note above)
2 large eggs
2 large egg yolks
½ tsp. vanilla extract

Set six 6-oz. ramekins in a baking dish. Put the sugar and water into a small, heavy saucepan and set it over medium heat. Stir to dissolve the sugar. Once the sugar has dissolved and the mixture is boiling, stop stirring and turn the heat to high. When the mixture begins to color, swirl the pan until the caramel is a deep amber brown; be careful—the caramel is extremely hot. Take the pan off the heat and immediately pour the caramel into the ramekins, swirling them right after each pour to spread the caramel evenly over the bottom.

Heat the oven to 325°F. In a medium saucepan, stir together the milk, cooked rice, ginger slices, sugar, and salt, if using. Set the pan over high heat and bring to a boil. Once boiling, take the pan off the heat, cover, and stir occasionally until the sugar is dissolved and the milk is infused with the ginger, about 10 min. In a medium bowl, whisk the eggs and yolks together, whisking just to combine. Slowly and carefully pour the liquid from the rice into the eggs in a very thin stream, whisking constantly (it's okay to leave rice behind). Pour the mixture back into the saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the rice is just suspended in the custard and the mixture coats the back of a spoon, 2 to 4 min. Immediately remove the pan from the heat. Fish out the ginger slices and discard them. Stir in the vanilla extract.

Ladle the custard into the ramekins, distributing it evenly. Pour very hot water into the baking dish so it comes halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Cover the pan loosely with foil. Bake until the custards are just about set but still slightly jiggly (they shouldn't feel too firm), 30 to 45 min., depending on the thickness and depth of your ramekins. Cool the ramekins in the water bath until you can safely lift them out. Cover and refrigerate overnight (so the caramel fuses with the custard). To serve, run a sharp knife around the inside rim of each ramekin and invert it onto a small serving dish.

Abby Dodge is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking and director of its test kitchen. ♦



This custard is just thick enough to hold the rice in suspension. The grains are evenly dispersed and won't sink to the bottom.

Comfort food meets a French classic. Gingered Crème Caramel Rice Pudding is a flavored rice pudding in *crème caramel* form.

Thicken stews with *beurre manié*

A quick and effective last-minute technique for thickening a stew is what's known as *beurre manié* (pronounced burr mahn-YAY), a French term that translates as kneaded butter. Despite its fancy-sounding name, *beurre manié* is nothing more than a soft paste made of equal parts butter and flour that you whisk into a simmering liquid just before serving.

The flour's starch is what thickens the liquid, but if the flour weren't first thoroughly combined with the butter, it would quickly lump up. The butter actually coats the particles of flour so that they can disperse evenly in the simmering liquid. The butter also adds a touch of richness, unlike the thin flour-and-water paste called a slurry or a whitewash.

To make *beurre manié*, knead butter and flour together with your fingertips or a wooden spoon until well combined. Make sure the butter is somewhat softened (but not melted or oily) before kneading.

There is no exact formula for how much *beurre manié* you need to thicken



Measure equal parts softened butter and flour and knead them together with your fingers or a wooden spoon.



Use a whisk to scoop up a bit of the *beurre manié* and whisk it into a simmering liquid to thicken it.

any given amount of liquid. It will depend on how thick the stew is to begin with and on your personal taste. For a good-size pot of stew (about 3 quarts or so), I generally measure out 2 or 3 tablespoons of butter into a small bowl or onto a saucer and then knead in an equal volume of flour until thoroughly combined.

Whisk in the *beurre manié* a bit at a time. Right before serving, bring the liquid to a vigorous simmer and then whisk in an acorn-size hunk of *beurre manié*. Let the liquid return to a simmer,

whisking continually, and gauge its viscosity—*beurre manié* will take effect instantly as soon as the liquid returns to a boil. Continue whisking in small bits of *beurre manié* until you get the thickness you're after. But be conservative since, unlike roux-thickened liquids, a *beurre manié* can leave a slightly floury taste.

Once thickened, the stew should be served immediately or set aside off the heat for later. Extended simmering can undo the effects of a *beurre manié* and bring out a floury taste.

Light vs. dark brown sugar

Brown sugar is, quite simply, white sugar that has been flavored and tinted with a bit of molasses. After the white sugar is refined, it's dissolved and mixed with a molasses syrup concentrate and then recrystallized. A thin film of molasses coats the sugar crystals and contributes to the color, flavor, and moisture of the sugar.

Light brown sugar contains less molasses (about 3½%) than dark brown

(6½%), accounting for differences in color and flavor. In general, if a recipe calls for brown sugar, it refers to light brown. Dark brown sugar (also called old-fashioned brown sugar) tends to be reserved primarily for recipes like baked beans, gingerbread, spice cakes, and other dishes where you really want a deep molasses flavor. You might also see granulated brown sugar in the grocery store. It has less molasses



than light brown sugar and has been dried so that it doesn't clump and will pour freely like white sugar.

If a recipe calls for brown sugar and you have none, you might try these substitutions

recommended by Rose Levy Beranbaum: For 1 cup of light brown sugar, use 1 cup white sugar plus ¼ cup molasses. For 1 cup of dark brown sugar, use 1 cup white sugar plus ½ cup molasses.

For safe thawing, defrost in the fridge

All frozen raw meats, poultry, and seafood should be thawed completely before cooking. Otherwise, the food may cook unevenly, leaving parts overdone and other parts underdone, or even still frozen.

The best conditions for thawing meats, poultry, and seafood are in the refrigerator. While this may take a while, it's the safest method and best preserves the food's texture and quality. Leave the food in its original wrapping and set it on a rimmed tray or plate to contain any juices.

The larger the item, the longer it will take to thaw. For instance, a 4-pound roast will take close to 24 hours, while an 8-ounce chicken breast will thaw in a few hours. A good guideline is 5 or 6 hours for every pound.

While you may be tempted to defrost something on the counter overnight, don't. Left at room temperature, the out-

side of the food will warm up enough to be a possible breeding ground for harmful bacteria, while the inside remains frozen. (Food should be left out on the counter to thaw for no more than 2 hours.)

If you're in a hurry, there are two options safer than the countertop. The first is to immerse the food, well wrapped (zip-top bags are best) in a large bowl or sink full of cold (around 50°F) water. Change the water occasionally to keep it fresh and cool. The food will defrost in a fraction of the time it would in the refrigerator. The second alternative is to use a microwave, following the manufacturer's instructions for defrosting. But keep in mind that food defrosted in a microwave should be cooked immediately afterward, because the microwave heats food unevenly and may cause hot spots, where the food has actually begun to cook.



In general, once food is thawed, it should be cooked within 24 hours, since thawed foods spoil and deteriorate much more rapidly than fresh, unfrozen foods.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



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Yeast's crucial roles in breadbaking

Yeast is the driving force behind fermentation, the magical process that allows a dense mass of dough to become a well-risen loaf of bread. And yet yeast is nothing more than a single-celled fungus. How does it do it?

Yeast works by consuming sugar and excreting carbon dioxide and alcohol as by-products. In bread making, yeast has three major roles. Most of us are familiar with yeast's leavening ability. But you may not be aware that fermentation helps to strengthen and develop gluten in dough and also contributes to incredible flavors in bread.

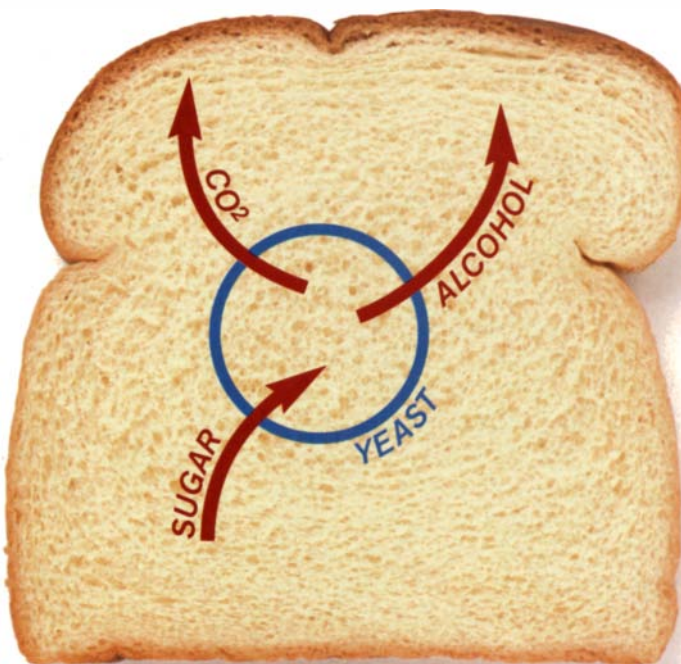
Yeast makes dough rise

The essentials of any bread dough are flour, water, and of course yeast. As soon as these ingredients are stirred together, enzymes in the yeast and the flour cause large starch molecules to break down into simple sugars. The yeast metabolizes these simple sugars and exudes a liquid that releases carbon dioxide and ethyl alcohol into existing air bubbles in the dough.

If the dough has a strong and elastic gluten network, the carbon dioxide is held within the bubble and will begin to inflate it, just like someone blowing up bubblegum. As more and more tiny air cells fill with carbon dioxide, the dough rises and we're on the way to leavened bread.

Yeast strengthens bread dough

When you stir together flour and water, two proteins in



Yeast cells thrive on simple sugars. As the sugars are metabolized, carbon dioxide and alcohol are released into the bread dough, making it rise.

down bread dough after its first rise, notice how smooth and strong the gluten has become, in part from the rise.

At this stage, most bakers stretch and tuck the dough into a round to give it a smooth, tight top that will trap the gases produced by fermentation. Then they let this very springy dough stand for 10 to 15 minutes. This lets the gluten bonds relax a little and makes the final shaping of the dough easier. This rounding and resting step isn't included in many home baking recipes, but it's a good thing to do.

Fermentation generates flavor in bread

As Harold McGee, the author of *On Food & Cooking*, has pointed out, big molecules in proteins, starches, and fats don't have much flavor, but when they break down into their building blocks—proteins into amino acids, starches into sugars, or fats into free fatty acids—they all have marvelous flavors. Fermentation, whether it's acting on fruit juices to make wine or on flour to make bread, does exactly that—it breaks down large molecules into smaller, flavorful ones.

At the beginning of fermentation, enzymes in the

the flour—glutenin and gliadin—grab water and each other to form a bubblegum-like, elastic mass of molecules that we call gluten. In bread making, we want to develop as much gluten as we can because it strengthens the

roll the dough through the machine, the dough becomes more elastic; in other words, more gluten is developed. And with puff pastry dough, every time you fold, turn, and roll the dough, it becomes more elastic.

Yeast acts as leavener, dough developer, and flavor builder.

dough and holds in gases that will make the bread rise.

Once flour and water are mixed together, any further working of the dough encourages more gluten to form. Manipulating the dough in any way allows more proteins and water to find each other and link together. If you've ever made homemade pasta, you know that each time you

Yeast, like kneading, helps develop the gluten network. With every burst of carbon dioxide that the yeast releases into an air bubble, protein and water molecules move about and have another chance to connect and form more gluten. In this way, a dough's rising is an almost molecule-by-molecule kneading. Next time you punch

yeast start breaking down starch into more flavorful sugars. The yeast uses these sugars, as well as sugars already present in the dough, and produces not only carbon dioxide and alcohol but also a host of flavorful byproducts such as organic acids and amino acids. A multitude of enzymes encourages all kinds of reactions that break big chains of molecules into smaller ones—amylose and maltose into glucose, proteins into amino acids.

As fermentation proceeds, the dough becomes more acidic. This is due in part to rising levels of carbon dioxide, but there are also more flavorful organic acids like acetic acid (vinegar) and lac-

tic acid being formed from the alcohol in the dough. (This is similar to what happens to a bottle of wine that has been left uncorked for a while: the alcohol combines with oxygen to make vinegar.) The acidity of the dough causes more molecules to break down. The dough becomes a veritable ferment of reactions. Eventually, the amount of alcohol formed starts to inhibit the yeast's activity.

Yeast has help in producing flavorful compounds. Bacteria are important flavor builders as well. There are bacteria in the dough from the beginning, but as long as the yeast is very active, it consumes sugars as quickly as



This loaf of artisan bread owes its complex flavor to a lengthy fermentation, which breaks down big molecules into smaller flavorful ones.

they're produced, leaving no food for the bacteria, which also like sugar. But when bakers chill a dough and slow down its rise, as Peter Reinhart does with his bagels (see pp. 68–72), the cold dramatically reduces yeast activity. The bacteria, on the other hand, function well even in cold temperatures, so

they now have an opportunity to thrive, producing many more marvelously flavorful acids.

Shirley O. Corriher is a food scientist, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, and the author of the award-winning book, CookWise (William Morrow). ♦

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Fortified wines add distinction



Skip the supermarket brands. Buy cooking wine at the liquor store or wine shop.

Fortified wines were created for after-dinner sipping, but they have also secured their place in the kitchen. With personalities that range from dry and fine, to smoky-caramel, to rich and raisiny and sweet, fortified wines add elegant distinction to all kinds of savory dishes and desserts.

Port, sherry, Madeira, and Marsala, the most familiar types of fortified wines, share a key production technique: each gets a boost of brandy or pure alcohol during or after fermentation. The timing of the addition determines how sweet the fortified wine will be: the earlier it's added, the sweeter the wine will be. On the dry side: Fino sherry, Sercial Madeira, and secco (Italian for dry) Marsala. On the sweet side: cream and Amoro sherry, Boal and Malmsey Madeira, dolce (Italian for sweet) Marsala. All ports—whether vintage (the best and most expensive), tawny, or ruby (the lowest quality and least expensive)—are sweet.

From the driest sherry to the deepest port, fortified wines have long been consid-

ered particularly appropriate when paired with meats, game, game birds, poultry, and shellfish. Classic dishes such as lobster Thermidor just wouldn't be the same without a shot of dry sherry. And dishes as disparate as veal Marsala and zabaglione need their lifeblood, Marsala, to give them their distinct sweet and slightly smoky flavor.

Whether cooking a classic or inventing your own, a splash of a fortified wine is a welcome addition to a finished soup or a simmering stew or sauce. I usually add it toward the end of cooking and then simmer it for a few minutes to remove any raw alcohol flavor and to marry the flavors of the wine with the soup or stew.

Fortified wines also do a neat turn *before* cooking as a marinade. I like to marinate lamb in a mixture of Madeira, garlic, and rosemary. And a ham braised in Madeira or Marsala, along with some broth, is a lovely thing.

On the sweet side, choose sweet sherry, Marsala, or port to flavor mousses, puddings, soufflés, and dessert sauces. Drizzle them over fruit, flavor

a sugar syrup with them and brush the syrup over cake layers, or whip the wine with eggs and sugar into an airy custard.

Use decent versions for cooking

In cooking, as in drinking, authentic versions offer the most satisfying character and flavor. To be sure you're buying the genuine article, look for the country of origin on the label: sherry from Spain; Madeira from the island of the same name off the coast of Portugal; Marsala from Sicily, and port from Portugal. A decent bottle—you probably don't want to use a vintage port in your onion soup—will cost \$10 to \$15. If that seems expensive for cooking wine, keep in mind that a little goes a long way. And unlike regular wine, which is best used within a day or two, a bottle of opened fortified wine can happily reside on a pantry shelf for at least a year with no loss in quality. Instead of opening a whole bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon to deglaze the pan in which I seared some steaks, I can use a little port instead.

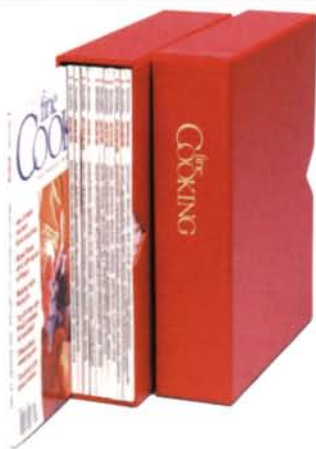
Just remember that a fortified wine has a stronger flavor: while a regular wine whispers hello in most dishes, a fortified wine shouts its greeting. If you use sherry in place of white wine in a chicken dish, you'll definitely taste the sherry. On the other hand, sherry, Marsala, and Madeira can be used almost interchangeably; the flavors are different, but they share the same intensity.

Experiment with fortified wines

- ◆ Stir some dry sherry into shellfish bisques or cream of chicken soup.
- ◆ Sauté chicken with onions, red peppers, tomatoes, paprika, and chopped ham and deglaze the pan with sherry.
- ◆ Steam mussels with some dry sherry, garlic, shallots, and fresh herbs.
- ◆ Stir a little Madeira into caramelized onions for a savory tart topping.
- ◆ Sauté chicken livers or calf's liver with onions and deglaze the pan with Madeira or sherry.
- ◆ Brush a berry tart with a berry glaze flavored with Madeira or Marsala.
- ◆ Flavor a caramel sauce with sweet Madeira or Marsala.
- ◆ Enrich a tomato or bolognese sauce with a splash of dry Marsala.
- ◆ Stir a spoonful of dry Marsala into mashed sweet potatoes or butternut squash.
- ◆ Braise lamb shanks in vegetable stock and port.
- ◆ Drizzle port over fresh strawberries.

Leslie Revsin is at work on her second cookbook. ♦

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SOURCES



At the Market

To order fresh chiles, try **Frieda's** (800/421-9477 or www.friedas.com) or **Melissa's** (800/588-0151 or www.melissas.com).

Hungarian Classics

Randall Price's Chicken Paprikás recipe (p. 34) was developed using sweet paprika (also called mild paprika), but if you like spicy, you could try it using a hot one, or making a blend. Look for imported Hungarian paprika in gourmet markets, or try one of the following mail-order sources.

- **Penzeys Spices** (800/741-7787 or www.penzeys.com): Sweet Kulonleges Paprika or Half-Sharp Paprika, 4 oz., \$3.49 (plus more sizes and prices).
- **Otto's Hungarian Import Store & Deli** (818/845-0433 or members.aol.com/HungImptrts): Kalocsa Mild or Hot, 10 oz., \$4.95; Szegedi Mild or Hot, 10 oz., \$4.95 (plus more sizes and prices—including a gunny sack full—100 kilos—for \$425, if you plan to make this menu a lot).
- **The Spice House** (www.thespicehouse.com): Kalocsa Csemege Sweet, 4 oz., \$2.29 (plus more sizes and prices).
- **The German Marketplace** (www.germanmarketplace.com, or 888/684-7487, for orders only): Hungarian Szeged Mild or Hot, 5 oz., \$2.99.

- **Cooking.com** (www.cooking.com): Szeged Sweet or Hot, 5 oz., \$3.50.

To make the Walnut & Rum-Raisin Crêpes, a crêpe pan isn't absolutely necessary, but it is helpful. **Bridge Kitchenware** (212/688-4220 or www.bridgekitchenware.com) carries a variety of steel crêpe pans.

Peanut Butter Cookies

For a small offset spatula to spread cookie fillings, call **A Cook's Wares**, 800/915-9788, or visit www.cookswares.com.



Olive Oil Cakes

A variety of stencil patterns can be ordered from **The Food Crafter's Supply Catalog** (call 800/776-0575 or visit www.kitchenkrafts.com) or from **Martha by Mail** (call 800/950-7130 or 813/979-6828 outside of the U.S. and Canada, or visit www.marthabymail.com).

Bagels

Malt powder, malt syrup, and high-gluten flour can be ordered from the **King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue** (800/827-6836 or www.kingarthurfLOUR.com).

Artisan Foods

For more information about **Confections by Michael Recchiuti**, call 415/826-2868 or visit www.recchiutichocolates.com.

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Soup of the Bakony Outlaws	34	390	270	12	18	31	14	10	5	85	430	3	per first course serving
Chicken Paprikas	34	450	270	36	9	30	9	9	9	105	410	1	per serving
Cucumber Salad	35	80	60	1	4	7	1	2	4	0	590	1	per serving
Walnut & Rum-Raisin Crêpes	36	240	120	4	26	14	6	4	3	45	130	1	per crêpe, 2 Tbs sauce
Chicken Breasts w Lemon-Caper Sauce	38	320	140	36	7	16	7	5	3	120	135	0	per serving
Fresh Spinach & Gruyère Pizza	45	430	200	18	38	23	8	11	2	90	830	2	per appetizer serving
Spinach, Shrimp & Feta w Fusilli	46	570	200	39	57	22	7	12	2	190	1220	5	per serving
Creamy Spinach	47	250	210	7	9	23	14	6	1	75	480	6	per 1/2-cup serving
Spinach Sauté w Brown Butter & Garlic	47	150	110	5	12	12	7	3	1	30	410	6	per serving
Sautéed Garlic Butter	49	35	35	0	0	4.0	2.0	2.0	0	5	80	0	per teaspoon
Lemony Chicken Meatballs	52	450	330	21	10	37	12	18	4	120	850	2	per serving
Lamb Patties w Chopped Herbs	53	210	110	23	1	12	4	5	2	80	500	0	per serving
Beef & Sausage Cushions	53	350	220	23	9	24	9	11	2	85	1040	1	per serving
Veal Patties w Toasted Hazelnuts	53	410	280	22	13	31	11	16	3	105	770	3	per serving
Peanut Butter Sandwich Cookies	54	390	230	8	36	25	11	10	4	45	290	2	per sandwich cookie
Dark Chocolate Cake	61	320	150	4	41	17	3	11	2	85	140	1	per slice (1/10 cake)
Carrot Cake w Orange Frosting	62	570	310	8	61	34	12	17	4	110	320	3	per slice (1/14 cake)
Plum & Blueberry Upside-Down Cake	63	270	80	5	42	9	2	6	1	80	190	1	per serving
Spanish Potato Tortilla	67	170	90	5	15	10	2	7	1	105	400	2	per tapa portion
Classic Water Bagels	71	100	10	3	18	1.0	0	0	0.5	0	390	1	per mini bagel
Classic Rice Pudding	75	330	100	11	47	11	6	3	1	140	200	0	per serving
Baked Brown Rice Pudding	76	570	360	9	45	40	19	11	9	105	150	2	per serving
Gingered Crème Caramel Rice Pudding	77	220	60	6	36	6	3	2	1	155	115	0	per serving
Pasta Carbonara	90	750	300	26	80	34	11	16	5	240	530	4	per serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

A pasta classic from the pantry



There's something wonderful to be said for a dish that can be made entirely from ingredients that are always at hand. As long as there are eggs and Parmesan in the fridge, bacon or pancetta in the freezer, and pasta in the cupboard, a satisfying meal of pasta carbonara can soon be on the table.

Some recipes for this classic Roman dish call for cream. But I find that a sauce made from eggs is amply rich and infinitely more appealing without it.

The key to carbonara is to start with eggs that are at room temperature (to get them there quickly, put them in their shells in a bowl of warm water for a few minutes) and to toss them with the pasta while it's still very hot. The heat cooks the eggs just enough to thicken them, allowing the sauce to coat the pasta sumptuously (the temperature should be hot enough to kill

any salmonella on the slim chance that the eggs are contaminated, but judge for yourself if this dish is for you). A metal bowl is ideal for tossing since it will best conduct the heat.

I often hold back a little of the pasta cooking water so that I can deglaze the pan in which the bacon was rendered to capture all of the bacony goodness.

Peas and thyme are my favorite additions for both color and complexity, but cooked asparagus cut into bite-sized pieces is also welcome.

Pasta carbonara is a great quick and easy supper but in my house, we think it makes the perfect brunch—it's certainly my favorite way to eat bacon and eggs.

Lisa Hanauer is a former chef-restaurateur who now writes about food. ♦

Pasta Carbonara

You can now find pancetta—Italian bacon—at many supermarkets, most often at the deli counter. Ask for it to be sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Serves four.

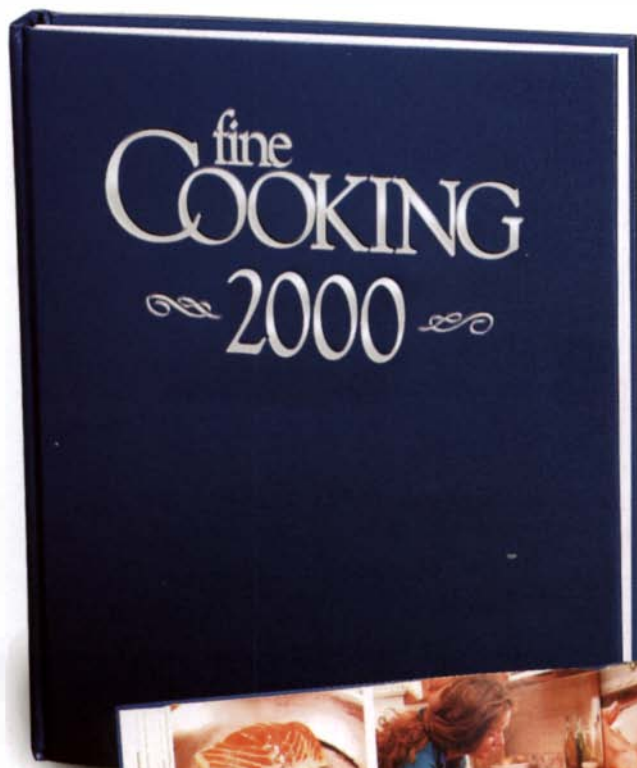
- 1 Tbs. olive oil**
- $\frac{1}{3}$ lb. pancetta or good-quality bacon, cut into thin strips about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick**
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature**
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves, coarsely chopped**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano*; more for grating on the finished pasta**
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**
- 1 lb. dried pasta**
- 1 cup frozen peas (optional)**

In a small sauté pan, heat the olive oil and cook the pancetta or bacon until cooked through but not crisp. Meanwhile, in a large metal bowl, lightly beat the eggs; add the thyme, cheese, salt, and pepper.

Cook the pasta in plenty of boiling salted water. About 1 min. before the pasta is done, add the peas (if using) to the boiling water. Scoop out and reserve about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the pasta water. When the pasta is *al dente*, drain it and immediately add it (and the peas) to the bowl with the egg mixture. Pour the bacon and the rendered bacon fat onto the pasta and toss well until the sauce thickens and coats the pasta. Add up to the entire $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the reserved pasta water to the bacon pan to deglaze it, scraping up any bits stuck to the pan, and add as much of this as you like to the bowl of pasta. Taste for salt and pepper. Grate more cheese and grind a little pepper on top of the finished pasta and serve.

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Sear-Roasting for Crisp and Juicy Results

An ovenproof skillet and two quick steps give you fish, chicken, or steak that's seared but still tender outside, moist and perfectly done inside.

BY CHARLIE ALEXANDER

A few minutes in the oven, and your seared fish, chicken, or steak is perfectly done. This is the best of both worlds: a quick sear on the outside, followed by a gentle roast in the oven. The result is a perfectly cooked piece of meat that's tender and juicy inside, with a crisp, golden-brown crust. This technique is perfect for fish, chicken, and steak. It's also a great way to cook a whole roast or a large piece of meat. The key is to use an ovenproof skillet and to sear the meat first, then roast it in the oven. This way, you get the best of both worlds: a quick sear on the outside, followed by a gentle roast in the oven. The result is a perfectly cooked piece of meat that's tender and juicy inside, with a crisp, golden-brown crust.

For the ultimate in sear-roasting, use a cast-iron skillet. This type of skillet is perfect for searing meat because it can withstand high heat and it's easy to clean. To sear the meat, heat the skillet over medium-high heat for a few minutes. Then, add the meat to the skillet and sear it for a few minutes on each side. After searing, transfer the meat to the oven and roast it until it's done. This way, you get the best of both worlds: a quick sear on the outside, followed by a gentle roast in the oven. The result is a perfectly cooked piece of meat that's tender and juicy inside, with a crisp, golden-brown crust.

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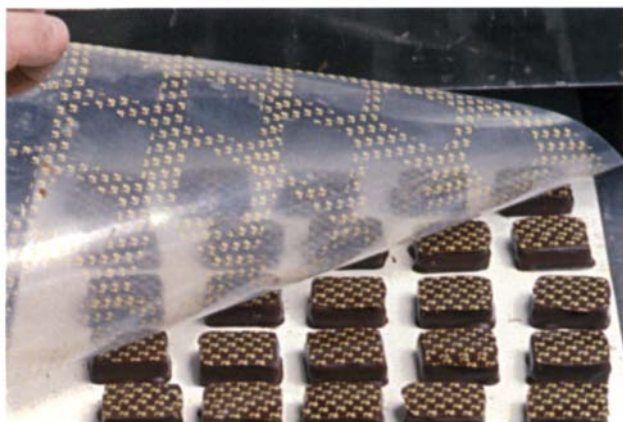
Exacting Chocolatiers



Michael Recchiuti and his wife, Jacky, are the hands behind Confections by Michael Recchiuti, a tiny artisan workshop tucked in a huge industrial warehouse building in San

Francisco. Michael attributes his love for the painstaking craft of chocolate-making to his training, “doing work that was all about detail.” He smilingly recalls one French master as “one of the most difficult people I ever worked with—and he taught me everything.”

Recchiuti chocolates are known not just for their exquisite looks but for their exotic infusions, with flavors that Michael insists must provide “a subtle background while letting the chocolate’s character and intensity come through,” like Kona coffee, star anise, fresh ginger, even rose oil. “A lot of chocolate makers flavor with booze,” he says, “but I think it masks true chocolate flavor.”



Ganache-filled squares are decorated by transfer-printing. The Recchiutis use acetate sheets imprinted with gold-colored cocoa butter.



As light as air, these delicate strips of gold leaf are placed into the molds first so they can top the filled candies.



White-chocolate ginger hearts get sealed with a bottom coat of extra-bitter chocolate to balance the white chocolate’s sweetness.



Exotic and elegant, yes, but these chocolates are more than just a pretty face. Michael uses prime ingredients like Scharffen Berger chocolate as the base for the candies.